FALL BOOKS

COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture

November 3, 2000

Alice McDermott on
Kazuo Ishiguro

Joseph Komonchak on
Cardinal Ratzinger

Alan Wolfe on
Religion & Politics

Valerie Sayers on
Mary Karr

Edward Wheeler on
'The Knox Brothers'

Israel & Yugoslavia
The Editors

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COMMONWEAL

November 3, 2000 / Volume CXXVII, Number 19

UPFRONT

Correspondence *Küng, Guinness & the 'homosexual agenda'* 4

Editorial *Enuf already* 5

Et cetera *Did we mention?—the sky is falling* 6

COLUMNISTS

Counting votes
Paul Baumann 7

Unions & Gore
E.J. Dionne Jr.
Getting out the vote 8

SHORT TAKES

Are unions obsolete?
George G. Higgins
The late Cardinal O'Connor's devotion to the labor movement 10

Look before you sign
John F. Hunt
Calling all trustees of Catholic colleges 11

ARTICLES

PETER ACKROYD & CATHOLIC ENGLAND
Suzanne Keen
The biographer of Thomas More brings the past to life in unexpected ways. 14

POETRY

Harlem Rooftop
Robert Lax 18

His Solitude
Charles W. Pratt 24

VERDICTS

SCREEN

Dancer in the Dark
Get Carter
Rand Richards Cooper 20

CULTURE WATCH

On screen, Bill's better self
Richard Alleva
President Clinton as muse 22

FALL BOOKS

When We Were Orphans
by Kazuo Ishiguro
Alice McDermott 25

Cherry
by Mary Karr
Valerie Sayers 27

God's Name in Vain
by Stephen L. Carter
Alan Wolfe 29

Cardinal Ratzinger
by John L. Allen Jr.
Joseph A. Komonchak 31

The Knox Brothers
by Penelope Fitzgerald
Edward T. Wheeler 32

The Century of the Gene
by Evelyn Fox Keller
Austin L. Hughes 34

The Song and the Truth
by Helga Ruebsamen
translated by Paul Vincent
Madeline Marget 36

Religion booknotes
Lawrence S. Cunningham 38

THE LAST WORD

Relative morality
Willard Francis Jabusch 47

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To the Editors

Solidarity with Küng

In the October 6 correspondence columns, Bill F. Mazzella writes that Hans Küng's fellow theologians "shamelessly" let him "stand alone" when Rome moved against him. Not all theologians: one hundred signed a letter of protest that appeared in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Moreover, shortly after this ad appeared, and as a direct result of Rome's actions, some theologians and other concerned Catholics in the United States founded the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church (ARCC). This organization is pledged to work for justice in the church and for the implementation of due process procedures. ARCC's *Charter of the Rights of Catholics in the Church* states that "Catholic teachers of theology have a right to responsible academic freedom. The acceptability of their teaching is to be judged in dialogue with their peers, keeping in mind the legitimacy of responsible dissent and pluralism of belief." ARCC's membership includes many theologians.

MARY LOUISE HARTMAN
Princeton, N.J.

The writer serves on the Executive Board of Directors of ARCC.

Rev. Obi-Wan Kenobi

Having relished the musings and idiosyncracies of *Commonweal*'s inspiring pantheon of scribes and icons, it was a delight to savor Keith Burris's recent commentary on stage and screen actor Alec Guinness [September 22].

While Sir Alec himself would disclaim any characterization as one of the twentieth century's preeminent screen actors, his presence and portrayals were not only distinguished, but "smashing" as his compatriots would attest. Burris captured both the screen persona of a remarkable actor and the subtle psyche which marked his genius. "Guinness was silence." Like Burris I have repeatedly viewed many Guinness movies and concur that his cinematic portrayals have a priestly aura which brought joy to his audience.

Perhaps due to space restraints reviewer Burris failed to comment on one great performance: the sergeant major in the movie *Tunes of Glory*. His hubris and affection for his comrades-in-arms, and his nefarious scheming which drove his commanding officer to suicide, left us to ponder whether our protagonist was mad or totally bereft of scruples and compassion.

BILL HONNEN
Saint Augustine, Fla.

The 'homosexual agenda'

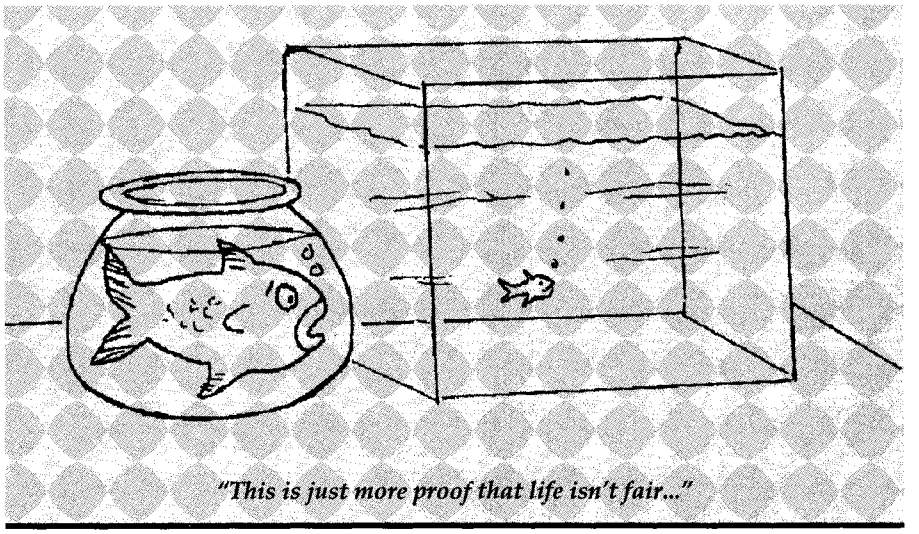
The subtlety of your commentary "The Homosexual Agenda" [October 6] is likely to arouse the ire of homosexual-rights activists and fuel the sanctimonious self-satisfaction of those who oppose legislation protecting gay and lesbian people from job discrimination and hate crimes and providing them with civil recognition of their same-sex partnerships.

As difficult as it may be when discussing matters that so closely affect the core of one's being, there is every reason to agree that dialogue on these issues should be reasoned, respectful, and absent of name-calling. Those who oppose the measures on the homosexual agenda, while firm in their beliefs, do in fact urge a policy of discrimination. The fact that they believe their discrimination is justified on religious principles does not make the discrimination any less real. We have to agree that society is full of discriminations that are felt to be justified and we do not call them wrong.

What is important for gay and lesbian activists to remember is that our work is not just about changing laws. We must be about changing attitudes and beliefs. This is tough work and the reality is that we seldom have access to the forums where we can honestly dialogue with those who believe differently from us on the moral questions involved with homosexuality. So while we earnestly seek those opportunities to address religious beliefs and moral views, we continue to press for civil action. We recognize that one function of law is to express society's view of what is right and wrong. The law frequently leads and points the way to a change in or clearer understanding of moral views.

ROBERT F. MIAILOVICH
Arlington, Va.

The writer is director-at-large and past president of Dignity/USA.



"This is just more proof that life isn't fair..."

Punishing gays

Regarding your editorial, "The Homosexual Agenda," is it right that the government punishes gays and lesbians who serve or wish to serve in the armed forces? Is it right that legislative bodies deny that there is even need for hate-crime laws?

(Continued on page 41)

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Enuf already

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall suffer frustration (always) and failure (frequently). The sweet satisfaction of something like success comes rarely and fleetingly; perhaps it never comes at all. Two cases in point:

Yugoslavia ■ The downfall of Slobodan Milosevic in Yugoslavia seemed impossible when he called for early elections this past summer. To the surprise of many, the pressure of economic sanctions, the Serbian defeat in Kosovo, and the persistent organizing of student dissidents finally brought the political opposition to an unprecedented level of unity and cooperation. When Milosevic's opponent, Vojislav Kostuirica, was denied his first-round victory in the election, a general strike, peaceful demonstrations, and concerted appeals to the military and police finally brought Milosevic's concession. His rule over Yugoslavia has ended—at least for the moment.

Here is where peacemakers will hold their breath. For Milosevic continues to control the Serbian parliament, his own political party, some 40 percent of the electorate, and those who have enriched themselves under his regime. What of the victor? The winner Kostuirica also appealed in the election campaign to Serbian nationalist feeling, not so strongly as Milosevic to be sure, but enough to overcome Serbian fears of capitulation to European and U.S. demands. Kostuirica has said that he will not turn over Milosevic to the International Tribunal at The Hague, which indicted him for war crimes in Kosovo, and that he will work to keep the remnants of Yugoslavia tied to Serbia—Montenegro and more explosively Kosovo. Yet, in marked contrast to Milosevic, Kostuirica is a man of law, a supporter of constitutional rule, and a politician apparently untainted by corruption. Whatever his own credentials and intentions, Kostuirica walks an extremely fine line. To thwart a return to the hard-line policies of Serbian nationalists, he must turn his electoral victory into effective governance, he must negotiate with Milosevic's still powerful allies, he must deal with the simmering hatreds in Bosnia and Kosovo, and he must respond to Western pressures and opportunities.

And the Serbian people themselves? Having thrown off the isolation that Milosevic's rapacious policies brought down upon them, how patient will they be with incremental change after a decade of economic decline? How badly damaged is Milosevic by his current loss of face and of power? Will he rise again? Most critically, how will the Serbs come to terms with the genocidal consequences of their own nationalist passions and policies? Serbian nationalists have long portrayed themselves as victims, most recently of NATO, but also of the Croatians, the Albanians, and the Bosnian Muslims. Some form of reckoning must be given for genocide, rape, and ethnic cleansing carried out in their name and often enough with their approval. Sending Milosevic to The Hague would be a good way to begin.

Europe and the United States, having achieved an important goal in the removal of Milosevic by democratic means, can afford to be patient. Even so, peacemakers must be vigilant in helping to resolve the unstable relationship of Serbia and Montenegro and the even more difficult questions that remain in Kosovo.

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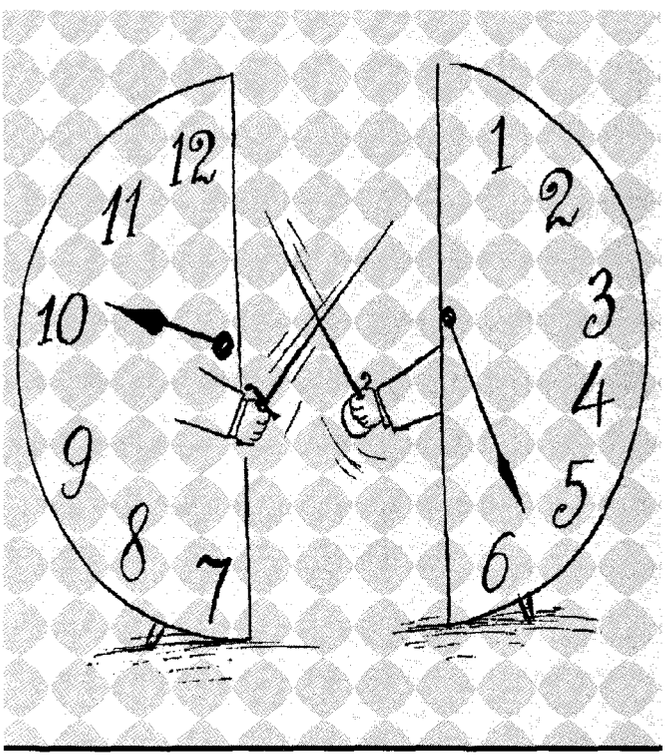
Israel and Palestine ■ In the meantime, the high hopes of August for a final settlement in the Middle East have been shattered. The Israelis and Palestinians have fallen upon one another in bloodcurdling violence, almost, it would seem, to stamp out forever even the possibility of peace. For many reasons, the current situation does not look like a temporary setback; it does not seem to be the storm before the calm.

Each side blames the other. Each seems ready, even eager to provoke more violence—sometimes officially, sometimes quasi-officially, and too often ad hoc on the ground. Apportioning blame is unlikely to help—and will itself cause new frictions and accusations. Everyone—Israeli and Palestinian—is responsible. Peacemakers must feel disheartened and dismayed.

Resuming peace negotiations—something that President Bill Clinton heartily wishes for—is far-fetched and counterproductive. Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright have run out of time. Until a new administration is in place, it would seem that little can be done. In any case, what can be done in the face of continuing clashes, the hardening of the Israeli position, and the erosion of control by Yasir Arafat? It is clearly time to ask whether the United States is any longer able to assist in peacemaking. Is it past time to ask a more difficult question: Does the United States delay a settlement by its peacemaking efforts?

We have supported the Clinton administration's strenuous efforts to bring about a final settlement. But has the cajoling, befriending, promising, monitoring, subventing, and guaranteeing made the demands and expectations of both Israelis and Palestinians ever more unrealistic: the Palestinians always holding out for more than they can realistically get; the Israelis withholding as much as possible however unrealistic? In other words, neither side has to be responsible for the hard work of peacemaking so long as the United States does it for them.



In the seven years since the Oslo Accords, on which all peacemaking efforts now rest, successive Israeli governments have permitted settlements in Gaza and the West Bank; they have denied Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem residence and construction permits, while permitting Israelis to buy land there; and they have created a system of roads and bypasses that will make the Palestinian-controlled West Bank a series of disconnected and isolated communities. Dare we use the word Bantustan?

On the other side, the Palestinian Authority, put in place by the Oslo Accords, has failed to democratize its rule, to police its own people, to provide basic services, or to control the territory it occupies. Islamic fundamentalists have made deep inroads among the young who see nothing change for the better and little chance that it will. Little wonder that Yasir Arafat cannot control the situation. Dare we use the word nihilism?

In recent weeks, the mob-slaughter of two Israeli soldiers under the protection of Palestinian policemen, and, on the other side, the killing of Arab citizens of Israel by Israeli police, are but two examples of the depths of hatred and even racism that sustain the violence. Would Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's offer at Camp David of a final settlement have been acceptable even to his own people, much less to the Palestinians? The rolling violence now seems a more accurate reflection of the Middle East mindset than photo-op handshakes by Arafat and Barak.

Perhaps the optimism of American policymakers that peace will come when political leaders talk to one another is mistaken and even destructive. More than five decades of violence and failed promises require something else: a stark calculation by Israelis and Palestinians of the future consequences of their current situation—a future with each other and without the constant mediation of the United States. The two must stand back and contemplate, on their own, a future of endless violence in which neither side can have a normal life, neither side can live in peace, neither side can be secure, and neither side can depend on the United States to keep them from making a realistic peace.

ET CETERA

Did we mention?—the sky is falling ■ Every election year, there are alarums about the impending demise of the ability to secure an abortion. "Unless, of course, you vote for..." Usually it's a candidate of the Democratic Party who raises the alarum and who duly promises to safeguard a woman's right and ability to choose an abortion against the forces of darkness, etc., etc. In New York's Senate race, both candidates, Democrat Hillary Rodham Clinton and Republican Rick Lazio, promise to keep this fundamental (soon to be God-given) right safe.

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A *New York Times* editorial [October 11] also weighs in on this important issue: "The fact is that in the nearly three decades since the *Roe* decision, a woman's right to choose abortion is becoming ever more fragile. In thousands of communities it is nonexistent." You would never guess that this is a nation where 1.37 million abortions were performed in 1996—the last year for which data is available—and no fewer than 34 million between 1973 and 1996. In fact, with an abortion rate of 23 per thousand in women of reproductive age, the United States continues to have one of the highest rates of abortion among developed nations.

The *Times* goes on to observe other ominous signs of the fragile condition of the abortion right: there has been a 30 percent drop in abortion providers since 1982, and 86 percent of U.S. counties have no abortion services. We couldn't find out what percentage of counties have no medical services at all, but here are some illuminating factoids: in almost one-quarter of all U.S. counties the population is under 10,000 and in more than half, it is under 25,000. Does population density have any effect on the number of abortion providers? Or could the 30 percent drop in providers have something to do with a drop in demand? In the early 1980s, the abortion rate was at its peak—29 per thousand for women aged 15–44. Since then, there has been a 22 percent decline in the rate; teen pregnancy rates are dropping and contraceptive use is increasing (up more than 25 percent since 1980). Is the sky falling? Or is the ceiling being lowered?

The *Times* editorial concludes, in what is presumably an endorsement of Al Gore: "The next president's views will have much to do with whether reproductive freedom is protected here and promoted abroad." Having discovered a fundamental American right to abortion in *Roe*, the *New York Times* is now eager to send it 'round the world.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

PAUL BAUMANN

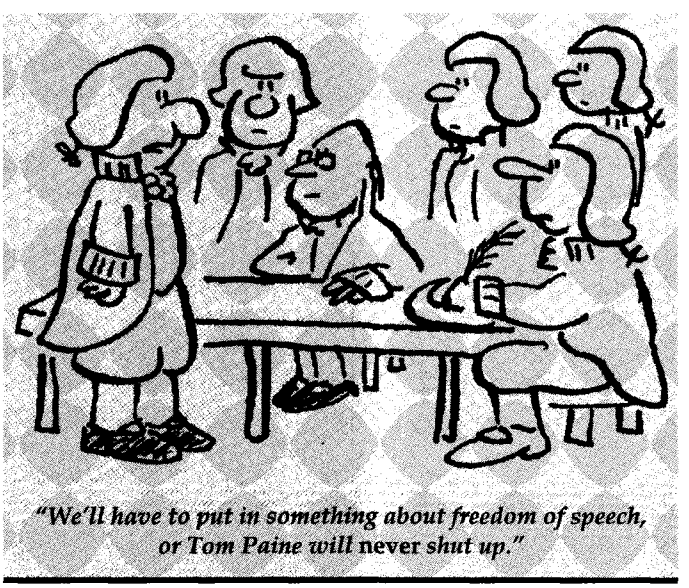
COUNTING VOTES

Not in the pulpit

I heard an interesting story from a reliable source the other day. The administrative board of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops recently sent a pamphlet, *Faithful Citizenship*, to all the parishes in the United States. The document encourages the religiously informed participation of Catholics in the political process, and more specifically in this year's election. (The bishops have been issuing such exhortations every presidential election year since 1975.) Although scrupulous about not endorsing any candidates or party, *Faithful Citizenship* lays out in some detail the church's social teaching as it touches on issues such as the minimum wage, health care, housing, and of course abortion and the death penalty. "Politics," the bishops write, "is about more than our own pocketbooks or economic interests."

Sounds like boilerplate stuff, really. But not everyone is content with boilerplate. In one of the nation's most conservative dioceses, a substantial number of more recently ordained clergy rebelled over the careful political neutrality of the document. The church has a moral obligation to endorse prolife candidates, they argued, and priests should do so from the pulpit. These priests are strong papalists who have taken to heart John Paul II's critique of modern society as the "culture of death." If one lives in a culture of death, extraordinary measures are called for.

In my parish an explicit prolife statement is made from the pulpit every week. It is hard to imagine there exists a single American who doesn't know where the Catholic church stands on legalized abortion. Of course, given the habitual way in which so many Catholics tune out the homily, perhaps the church's prolife stance would be news to some regular churchgoers. So if nothing else, endorsing candidates from the pulpit might rouse the dozing parishioner. It would not, however, increase the credibility of the church on issues of great public moment, nor will it advance the prolife cause.



"We'll have to put in something about freedom of speech, or Tom Paine will never shut up."

Endorsing candidates from the pulpit crosses the line separating church and state and raises legitimate questions about the tax-exempt status of religious organizations. Nonpartisanship is the price paid, and rightly so, for tax-exempt status. It is also worth noting that a church that endorses candidates will inevitably endorse losing candidates and thereby greatly

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diminish its influence on those who do win elections. Nonpartisanship has its own kind of moral leverage.

Nor are American Catholics likely to take kindly to being told whom to vote for by their priests. Any priest who thinks he can dictate the political choices of his parishioners is living an ultramontane fantasy. (The reaction of non-Catholics traditionally suspicious of papal power need hardly be elaborated on.) Of course the Left is also not immune from this tendency to identify the church with a particular political agenda. I know I react skeptically when liberal Catholics equate the church's social teaching with the most "progressive" wing of the Democratic Party or when it is suggested that the Catholic solution to our economic and social problems is to import what amounts to European social democracy. I do not look to Europe, let alone the Vatican, for models of democracy.

Yes, politics is about more than one's own narrow economic interests. But politics is not an exercise in altruism by other means, either. Americans keep their own interests in mind when voting for more than selfish reasons: they are responsible for themselves and their families in a way that a good deal of papal social teaching doesn't quite comprehend. Even on stark issues like abortion, there can be no simple equation between the church and any political program or party. Because of the number of actors involved and the variety of interests at stake, political action is inherently complex and fraught with unintended consequences. Given those facts, how you conjure up an unambiguous endorsement of specific programs like affirmative action or public housing subsidies or the abortion plank in the Republican platform as "Catholic" positions has always eluded me. Don't get me wrong. Catholics have an obligation to seek social justice, house the homeless, feed the poor, and reduce the number of abortions. However, the best way to pursue these goals is hardly self-evident. A larger federal government, for example, may not be the best solution to economic inequality. A job, as the saying goes, is the best antipoverty program. But what is the best way to create jobs? The answer is not found in the Gospels or any encyclicals I've read.

Electoral politics is a complicated business, with fair-minded people spread out across the political spectrum. Yes, abortion is a moral abomination, but at this late date it is an abomination beyond the ability of any single party or candidate to bring to an end. Americans, I believe, are looking for an honest compromise that will restrict late-term abortions. Endorsing prolife candidates from the pulpits of Catholic churches will destroy any chance of reaching such a compromise. And without compromise, the "culture of death" is likely to become more virulent, and faithful citizenship even more precarious. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

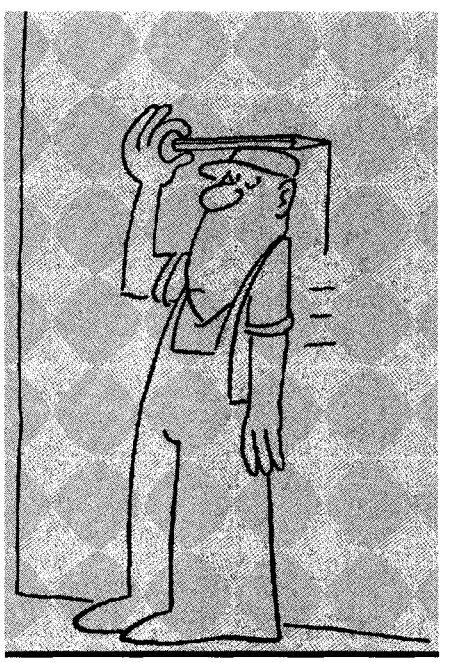
E.J. DIONNE Jr.

UNIONS & GORE

Does labor hold the key to victory?

They were working late all week at a union office in Dunmore, Pennsylvania, and Maryjule Kapacs was very pleased. "On Monday night," said Kapacs, the president of a United Steelworkers unit, "we made 264 phone calls. We got 9 noes and 255 yeses." A "yes" is a vote for Al Gore. No, Gore won't carry Pennsylvania by twenty-eight to one. But if he does win, he'll owe a huge debt to Maryjule Kapacs and thousands of union activists like her.

This is the do-or-die election for the American labor movement. Every union leader—from the very top to the grassroots—knows it. This is the election in which organized labor, through a Gore victory, will prove itself to be the most potent grassroots force in American politics. Or, if George W. Bush wins, the unions will face what they fear will be one of the most hostile administrations they've confronted in a century.



Even the unions most resistant to Gore have fallen in behind him. The last big holdout, the United Mine Workers, endorsed Gore at a meeting in Charleston, West Virginia in late September—although the union's own press release acknowledged that its leadership "had serious concerns about Vice President Gore's environmental stances." So Gore wrote Mine Workers' President Cecil Roberts promising that "coal will play a critical role in our energy future."

Gore had won the Teamsters' endorsement earlier in the month, even though Teamster President James Hoffa had flirted with both Bush and Ralph Nader. Hoffa, who like other labor leaders denounced the Clinton-Gore administration's support for free trade, will likely be courted by the Republicans after the election in any event. He clearly did not want to be the one union leader frozen out of a Gore White House.

The stakes are high for labor this year not only because of the issues, but also because this election marks the definitive

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test of the movement's four-year process of rebuilding its political prowess. In 1996, the AFL-CIO waged a high-stakes campaign of televised "issue ads." The campaign increased labor's visibility but produced fewer Democratic gains than the federation had hoped. So in 1998, labor shifted resources to "member-to-member" contact, including leafleting at plant gates and organizing phone banks. The result was a large union turnout for Democrats, who made surprising midterm gains. Steve Rosenthal, the AFL-CIO political director, said the unions concluded that business groups would always outspend labor so traditional campaign spending was useless. Better to invest union money in organizing the one resource labor has in abundance: people.

And those people tend to live in the right places: this election's battleground states. In 1996, according to exit polls cited by Rosenthal, some 40 percent of Michigan voters came from households with at least one union member. The union household proportion was 34 percent in Ohio, 31 percent in Illinois, 30 percent in Wisconsin, and 29 percent in Pennsylvania. Union mobilization may upend the traditional view that low turnout helps Republicans. Because union members are now more mobilized, says Rosenthal, a drop in turnout could increase labor's share of the electorate—and help Democrats.

Rosenthal acknowledges the unions have learned from observing Christian Coalition organizing, much as the coalition borrowed many tactics from labor. Rosenthal referred explicitly to the Christian Coalition's former executive director in explaining why the unions needed to beef up their sagging organizational capacity. "Ralph Reed was fond of saying he had lifted a page from our organizational manuals," Rosenthal says. "But that page was missing from our organizational manuals. So we're taking our page back."

The intensification of labor's political efforts is embodied in Pennsylvania by a new program at the Service Employees International Union. J.J. Johnston, the SEIU's state director, said eighty of its members have taken leave from their jobs and are being paid their salaries by the union to organize for the elections. Andy Stern, the president of the SEIU, says that Gore's strength among union members creates a new challenge: to translate support for Gore into backing for Democrats down the ticket, particularly in crucial Senate races in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Missouri, New York, and Washington state. In all of them, he says, the Democratic candidates are polling behind Gore.

Nobody is more aware of how important the unions are to a Democratic victory than Democrats themselves. "We'd be lost without them," says Tom O'Donnell, a Democratic consultant at the center of his party's effort to recapture the House of Representatives. "When you look across the political spectrum from right to left, nobody's been as effective as labor and nobody can match them. You didn't say that four or six years ago." □

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George G. Higgins

ARE UNIONS OBSOLETE?

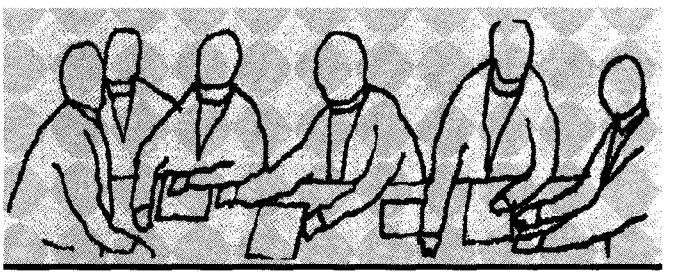
Neuhaus v. O'Connor on labor

New York City's largest union of health-care workers has published a handsome twelve-page booklet to honor the memory of the late Cardinal John J. O'Connor and his commitment to workers. The booklet was produced by New York's Health and Human Service Union, which is Local 1199 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). It notes that O'Connor stressed his "bone-deep" commitment to working people and to the labor movement in his annual Labor Day Masses at Saint Patrick's Cathedral and in many of his speeches and writings. The cardinal was shown a preview of SEIU's booklet shortly before his death last May. The three labor officials who made the presentation told me that O'Connor was deeply gratified and moved almost to tears.

In the circles in which I move, reaction to the SEIU booklet has been enthusiastically favorable. I was not surprised, however, that some Catholics, and notably one of the cardinal's own New York priests, Father Richard John Neuhaus, have reacted negatively to the booklet. Neuhaus, editor of the monthly magazine *First Things* and author of several important books, said in an August interview in the *National Catholic Register* that the cardinal's support of labor unions was a weakness rather than a strength. "It was one of the few areas in which we did not see eye to eye," Neuhaus told the *Register*. He claimed that the kind of class-based ideology—labor vs. management, boss vs. worker—which, in his view, has historically shaped American labor, is now obsolete.

Neuhaus never publicly spoke this way about the cardinal's stand on labor issues while the cardinal was alive. I think it is a great pity that he held his fire until it was too late for O'Connor to respond. It would have been highly instructive and jolly good fun to watch two such combative and articulate controversialists go at it in a wide-open public debate about the role of unions in our economy.

The reason I was not surprised by Neuhaus's interview is that, whatever his relationship with the cardinal, he has said more than once in his own writings that the American labor movement as we have come to know it is obsolete. Because one of his published articles on this subject was a negative response to something I had written, he will not be surprised if I reopen the issue.



I strongly disagree with Neuhaus's stand on labor. To begin with, it is misleading to say, as he does, that the declining number of workers who belong to unions do so only because "closed union shops give them no choice." That may have been a typographical error. "Closed union shops" are illegal and nonexistent in the United States.

Second, one of the most important reasons for the decline in union membership today is the fact that our federal and state labor legislation is badly outmoded and is heavily stacked against workers who are trying to exercise their right to organize. Although Neuhaus is phenomenally well-read, he gives no indication that he has absorbed the mass of scholarly literature on the need for labor-law reform.

Third, Neuhaus implies that the only significant growth in union membership is in unions representing government workers. That's half correct, half wrong. It is true, of course, that government employee unions have grown in recent years, but the largest and fastest-growing union is the SEIU. It represents only a small number of government employees. The vast majority of its members are extremely low-paid service employees (janitors, home-care and health-care workers, etc.), many of whom are people of color and/or legal or illegal immigrants. The same is true of several other growing unions, notably that of the hotel workers.

The old-line industrial unions representing auto workers, steel workers, etc., have obviously suffered a decline in recent years, but it is simplistic to suggest that the main reason for this decline is that "organized labor has largely lost the confidence of American workers." The decline in membership in the major industrial unions has little or nothing to do with the lack of confidence of workers in their unions and almost everything to do with the disappearance of jobs in the so-called rust belt due to structural economic causes.

Finally, Neuhaus's premature epitaph for the American labor movement suggests a deficient grasp of Catholic social teaching on the purpose of unions. Catholic social teaching clearly holds that even if all workers enjoyed decent wages and working conditions (and millions, of course, do not) there would still be a need for unions in order to empower workers to participate more effectively in the conduct of their own industries and in the overall conduct of our economy.

The 1986 pastoral letter of the U.S. bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, states this broader purpose very clearly in a paraphrase of section 94 of John Paul II's 1981 encyclical *Laborem exercens*, which the pope amplified ten years later in *Centesimus annus* (section 43). It is well known that Neuhaus and other neoconservatives strongly disagree with the bishops' pastoral, but I would encourage them to look again at the totality of John Paul II's encyclicals.

In closing, let me profusely thank Local 1199 of SEIU for posthumously honoring Cardinal O'Connor's steadfast support of organized labor. □

Monsignor George G. Higgins, *a long-time contributor, was recently awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.*

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John F. Hunt

LOOK BEFORE YOU SIGN

Ex corde and college trustees

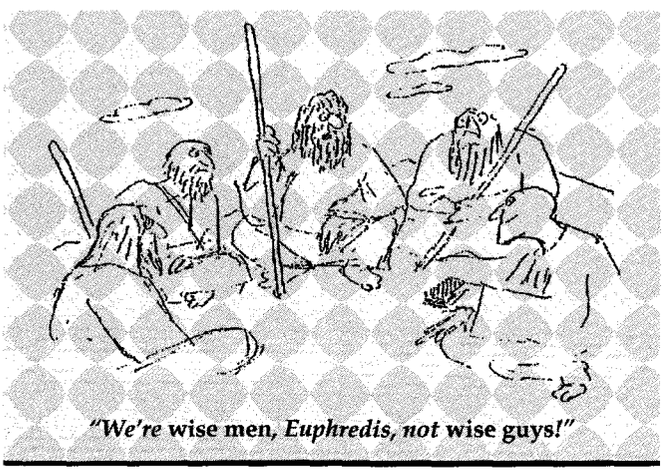
The revised, and now Vatican-approved, local ordinances ["U.S. norms"] of the Catholic bishops of the United States for the implementation of the 1990 Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde ecclesiae* go into effect next May. They prescribe requirements for Catholic colleges and universities to be "officially" Catholic. A large majority of the Catholic universities that are not officially so are to be found in the United States. They are the focus of what follows, for they must now decide whether to become "officially" Catholic.

Under Caesar's laws, not ostensibly contrary to Catholic faith or morals, each member of a university's governing body ["trustee"], whether cleric, religious, or lay person, Catholic or non-Catholic, has a fiduciary duty to decide whether or not accepting this invitation from the papacy is in the best interests of the university. Secular law does not dictate a fiduciary's decision; it only requires that he or she be adequately informed and consider all the relevant data.

There is much to be said, and undoubtedly much will be said at university governance meetings, in favor of embracing *Ex corde*. The document is certainly not radical, having antecedents in the 1917 Code of Canon Law (nothing to be done or taught contrary to faith or morals and hierarchical supervision) and the 1983 revised Code of Canon Law.

University trustees, however, must look at both sides of the coin. To begin with they should be aware that no church legislation has ever interdicted unofficial Catholic endeavors (*Commonweal* is an example). Such groups do not lose their Catholicity if they decline, as the trustees of Sacred Heart University in Connecticut recently did, a hierarchical invitation to become officially Catholic.

Beginning with this awareness, trustees must consider the consequences of official Catholic status. The first consequence



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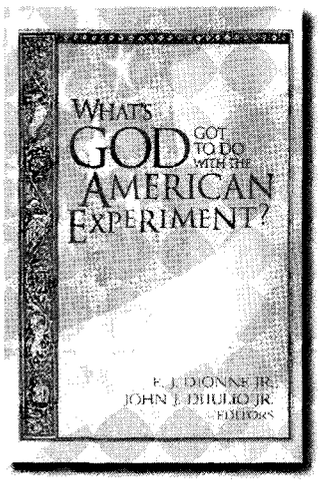

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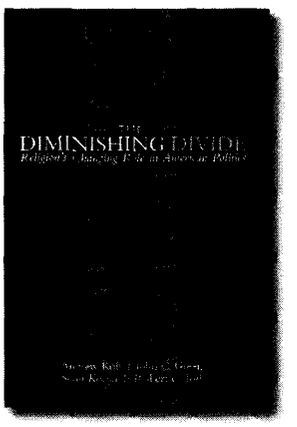

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is a fundamental change in the present legal status, canonical and secular, of the university. Since the governing documents of these institutions have not previously been submitted to and approved by competent ecclesiastical authority, the universities are not "juridic" persons under canon law. Therefore, they do not now have any obligations under church legislation or determinations. *Ex corde* and the U.S. norms require such submission if a university is to be considered "officially" Catholic, and they explicitly require a university to incorporate its commitment to *Ex corde* and the U.S. norms in its governing documents, effectively creating a "juridical relationship" with the church. Such a relationship has consequences under secular law: consequences well beyond, and perhaps more important than, probable exemption from federal laws that forbid religious discrimination in employment.

While our legislatures and courts properly abstain from involvement in religious matters, our courts, when requested, must resolve disputes over property and contractual matters, even though these arise in the context of religious disputes. When application of religious "law" is necessary to resolve such disputes, our courts defer to religious authorities to determine such "laws." As Paul Saunders recently reminded us (*Commonweal*, April 21), a judicial relationship with the church permitted The Catholic University of America, a pontifical university, to implement a 1986 Vatican directive depriving Charles Curran, a tenured professor of theology, of his right to teach in his area of competence. In 1986 The Catholic University of Puerto Rico, also juridically related to the church, was successful in terminating a tenured assistant professor of English, Jeanette Quilichini Paz, because, after having been married in the church, she remarried without a canonical annulment after a civil divorce.

Thus, in some cases the juridical relationship with the church will dictate the outcome under secular law of civil disputes involving the relationships of an official Catholic university to members of its faculties and administration. Aside from such legal consequences and the consequences of the much-debated requirement that teachers of theological disciplines have and maintain a revocable license (mandate) to teach from the local diocesan bishop, what are the other results of attaining official status?

Ex corde and the U.S. norms require that, to the extent "possible," a majority of the faculty and of the members of the board of trustees be Catholic. Even if this is now the case at Catholic universities, should they become officially Catholic it must remain the case. This means that some sort of "Catholic or not" list will be needed to guide decisions on board and faculty appointments and, because of long-term effects, on the granting of tenure to teachers.

A highly qualified young non-Catholic academic either may not seek or may decline an offer of appointment from an official Catholic university or, if already on its faculty, may migrate to a university at which his or her religion, or lack of religion, will not enter into tenuring decisions. Moreover, a highly qualified Catholic academic may prudently conclude that such an appointment or tenure may be attributed by peers to his or her religion and may thus want to avoid such a shadow by seeking a career elsewhere.

Ex corde and the U.S. norms also require that the university appoint to a teaching position only those who are "outstanding" in "probity of life"; those who are so lacking must be dismissed. It is reasonable to assume that some percentage of both Catholics and non-Catholics in the United States lack such "probity of life" in the eyes of church authorities for a variety of reasons (remarriage without a canonical annulment, receiving the Eucharist while "living in sin," etc.), and that this group includes, though perhaps to a lesser degree, a not insignificant number of teachers at Catholic universities. Where a lack of "probity of life" is locally known, compliance with *Ex corde* will require the initiation of dismissal proceedings. Moreover, the Vatican has recently reaffirmed (see "License for Vatican Sneaks," *The Tablet*, August 28, 1999) the need for and propriety of "delation," that is, secret submissions to church authorities of derogatory information by concerned Catholics who can remain anonymous. Hence, lack of probity of life need not be notorious to trigger initiation of dismissal proceedings. Will the "probity of life" requirement and its enforcement mechanisms create a potential for mischief, fear, and demoralization in Catholic university communities?

Another consequence of becoming officially Catholic is that the university will be subject to the canon laws restricting the disposition of permanent assets that have more than a relatively modest value. Regardless of the views of its trustees, such a university with a financially troubled hospital owned by its medical school will need hierarchical permission to sell the hospital or merge it with another hospital. Similar permission will be required for mergers of the university itself with another university or of one of its professional schools with another professional school.

Ex corde requires that all official actions or commitments of the university be in accord with its Catholic identity, thus further circumscribing the university's autonomy in the areas of granting honorary degrees, sponsorship of guest lecturers, and university support for student organizations. The local diocesan bishop is charged with enforcement of all these requirements.

Thus the decision of a fully informed trustee whether to embrace *Ex corde* poses many questions, some relevant only to a particular institution but others more broadly relevant. Would a serious and well-funded Catholic Studies program be sufficient to enhance the university's Catholicity? Is the "good" the university now accomplishes an enemy or an ally of the potentially "perfect" Catholic university? What are the economic consequences of choosing to be an official or unofficial Catholic university in the United States? These are among the many issues boards will have to consider in meeting their fiduciary responsibility to the schools they govern. □

John F. Hunt *is a retired partner of the law firm of Cravath, Swaine & Moore in New York City.*

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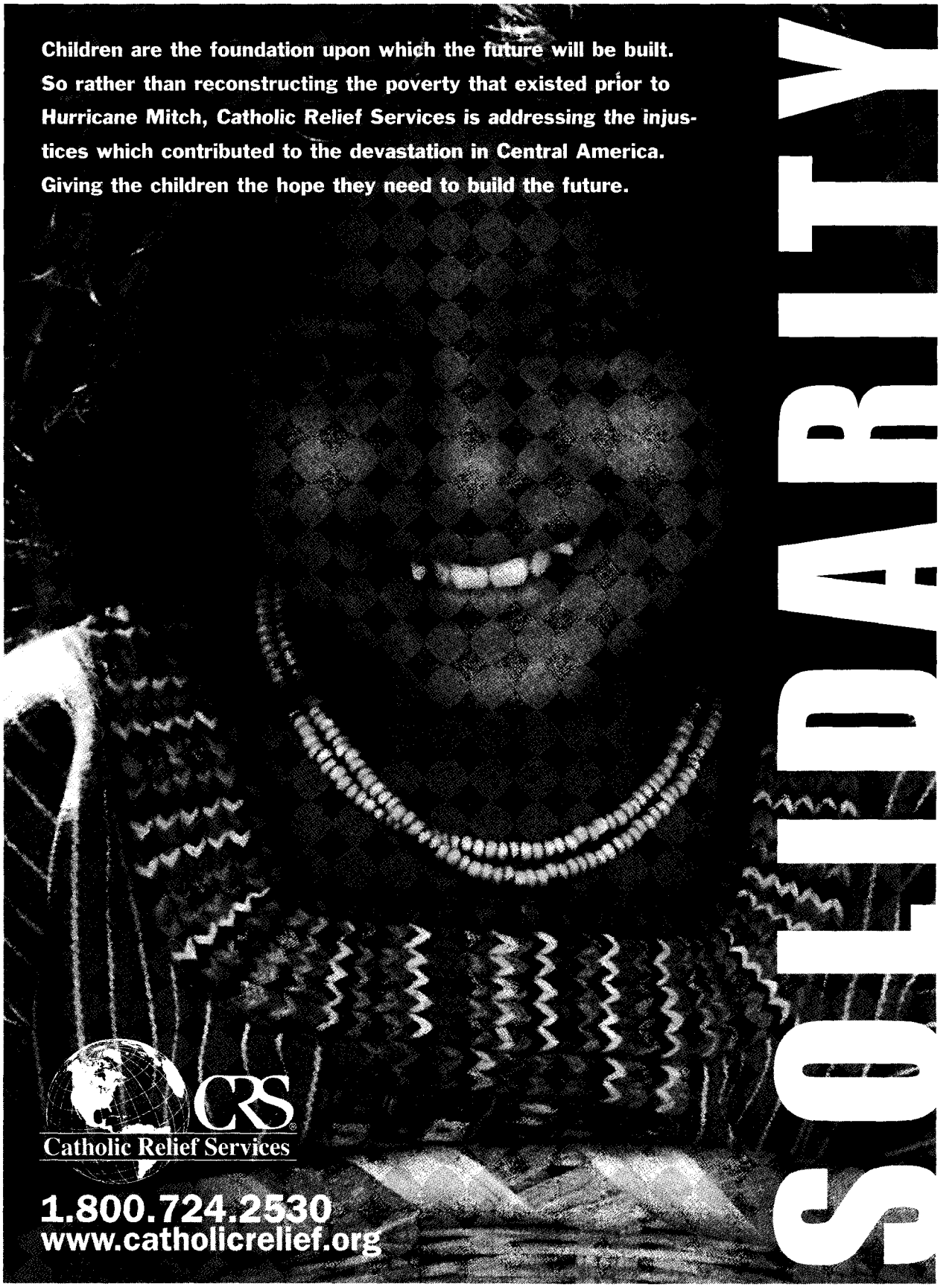
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PETER ACKROYD & CATHOLIC ENGLAND

At present, living in the past

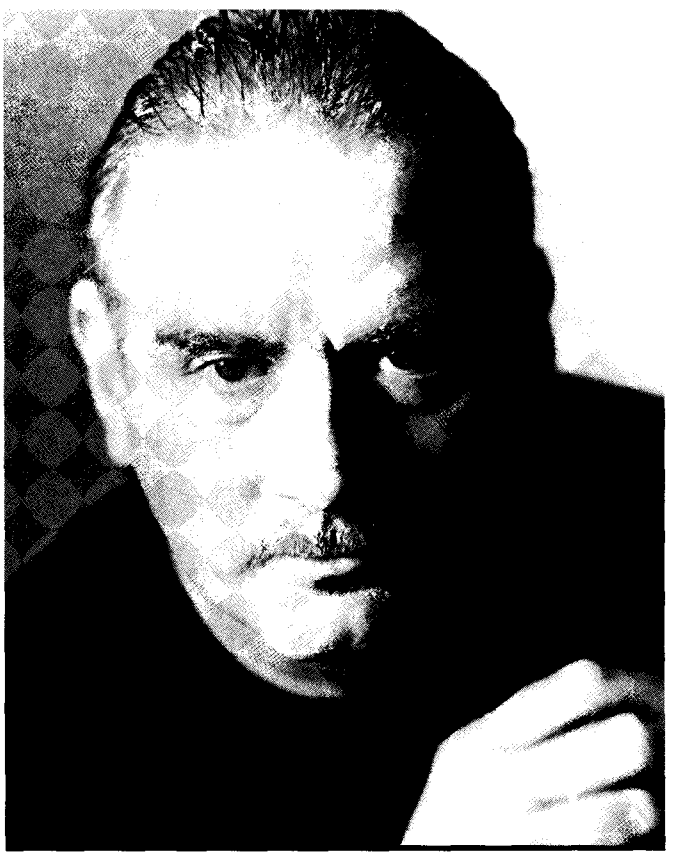
Suzanne Keen

I prefer the city in darkness; it reveals its true nature to me then, by which I suppose I mean its true history. During the day it is taken over by its temporary inhabitants, and at those times I feel as if I might be dispersed and lost among them. So I keep my distance. I imagine them in the clothes of another century, for example, although I realize that this is very fanciful. But there are occasions when a certain look, or gesture, plunges me back into another time; it is as if there had been some genetic surplus, because I know that I am observing a medieval or a sixteenth-century face. When the body of a neolithic traveller was recovered from an Alpine glacier, sprawled face down in the posture of death, it was considered to be an extraordinary act of historical retrieval. But the past is restored around us all the time, in the bodies we inhabit or the words we speak. And there are certain scenes or situations which, once glimpsed, seem to continue for eternity.

PETER ACKROYD
The House of Doctor Dee

British novelist and biographer Peter Ackroyd is not widely known in the United States, at least not to the general reading public. His acclaimed 1998 biography *The Life of Thomas More* brought him to the attention of an American Catholic audience, but his ten novels, though they have earned a loyal readership both here and in England, have not pushed him visibly into the front ranks of contemporary fiction writers. That's too bad, because Ackroyd is a fascinating writer with a singular voice. His novels as well as his superb biographies (he has written five) are all passionately engaged in attempting to imagine what the past might have been like. Though his methods are extremely bookish, he extends himself imaginatively to call up in rich detail lives radically different from our own. He is insistently interested in continuities over time, but fixes on the oddest items—the location of a left-wing bookshop in a neighborhood where seventeenth-century religious radicals used to hang out, for example—to reconnect us to our never-quite-dead past. The quirkiness of his vision is seductive, and makes him seem sincere where so many postmodern writers interested in history are insincere as an article of unfaith.

Some time in the last few years, after several decades of dogged labor, ineffectually disguised by a playful public persona, Ackroyd became a man of letters. In both the novels and biographies (which include lives of T. S. Eliot, Charles Dickens, William Blake, as well as More) he has produced a unique sequence of literary pictures of London through the centuries. A forthcoming "biography" of London will offer readers the yield of Ackroyd's lifelong obsession—a comprehensive study of his hometown. The city has served as more than a backdrop in many of his novels; it is a central locale for the celebration of a native English tradition of spectacle, ritual observances, and festive burlesque. Ackroyd knows London by heart—knows it as Dickens, or Blake, or Thomas More would have known it. He represents it with antiquarian zeal, but unlike many of the heritage-fixated,



London's biographer

Suzanne Keen, *a frequent contributor, is associate professor of English at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia.* *The author wishes to thank the curators of the Beinecke Library for their assistance in consulting the Peter Ackroyd Papers and to express her gratitude for their award of a John D. and Rose H. Jackson Fellowship, which made her work in the Ackroyd Papers possible.*

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he does not despise the present. Readers can anticipate that the London biography will appreciate the living city while serving up a combination of historical conjuring and visionary leaps through time.

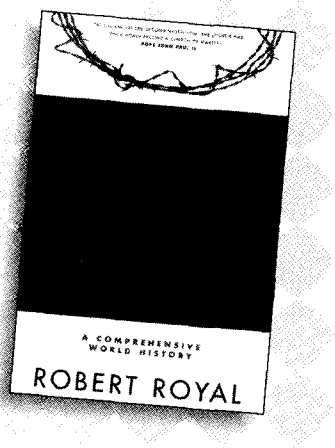
These preoccupations can be traced in Ackroyd's earlier works, but such thematic handles are the slightest of helps in getting a grip on this prolific writer. Reading him conveys a sense of a restless imagination disciplined by unvarying work habits and a desire for a steady income. A self-acknowledged workaholic, Ackroyd is a bookworm's bookworm, whose imaginary worlds radiate out from the British Library. Though he talks freely about his life and opinions in interviews, this is no confessional author. His homosexuality, a recent heart attack, the loss of his long-time companion to AIDS, his drinking problem—are no secret. But Ackroyd resists the current fad for autobiographical writing, submerging himself instead in the task of imagining the look, feel, smell, and above all the language of characters and times that can be reached only by exercising the imagination.

Nor does Ackroyd fit in among the better known now-middle-aged British writers such as Julian Barnes and Martin Amis. He describes the difference in quasi-religious terms—the rest are secular writers, but he is steeped in sacred forms and rituals. In his fiction, time is cyclical and tradition is tenaciously rooted to place. The present contains the traces of the past in human and verbal forms. In the essay "Some Old Haunts," he writes that "it is possible to walk down a street and glimpse a face, or gesture, which seems to have sprung from some past time. These same gestures and movements, even the very words themselves, have been repeated and revived over many generations in that precise place. I have seen medieval faces, Elizabethan faces, eighteenth-century faces, and in that recognition I realized that in London it is possible to understand everything within the eye of eternity."

Ackroyd has built his career by steeping himself in the work of a historical period, by mimicking its lingo, quoting its popular songs, and navigating its byways. Addressing aspiring novelists, he defies conventional wisdom and advises, "Write what you don't know." He revisits the past without cleaning it up (in fact he often lingers on old vices), and without rendering the historical encounter as especially redemptive for his present-day characters. In *Hawksmoor* (1985), *Chatterton* (1987), *English Music* (1992), and *The House of Doctor Dee* (1993), a structure of gothic horror undergirds the stories. Déjà vu blends with the frisson of horror, while the present becomes the meeting place of all our pasts. We marvel that our ancestors could have lived through those dark, unpoliced, dangerous, and nasty times.

In *Hawksmoor*, for instance, modern-day London is reconnected with its late-seventeenth-century past, when architects worked to rebuild after the Great Fire. The title suggests the architect Hawksmoor (1661–1736), whose churches, with Wren's, are among the city's most distinguished edifices. Yet Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* is a hard-boiled detective at work on a serial murder case which can only be solved by time travel. The fantastic and gothic erupt into

A Century of Martyrdom



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Books discussed in this essay

Blake: A Biography
Ballantine, $18, 416 pp.

Chatterton
Grove-Atlantic, $12, 234 pp.

Dickens
Mandarin, £10, 1,256 pp.

The Diversions of Purley and Other Poems
Abacus (out of print)

Dressing Up: Transvestism and Drag, the History of an Obsession
Simon & Schuster (out of print)

English Music
Penguin (UK), £7.99, 416 pp.

Ezra Pound and his World
Thames and Hudson (out of print)

The Great Fire of London
Penguin (UK), £6.99, 176 pp.

Hawksmoor
Penguin (UK), £6.99, 224 pp.

The House of Doctor Dee
Penguin (UK), £7.99, 288 pp.

The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde
Penguin (UK), £6.99, 192 pp.

The Life of Thomas More
Doubleday, $17.50, 448 pp.

London: The Biography
Chatto and Windus, £25, 640 pp.

Notes for a New Culture: an Essay on Modernism
Vision (out of print)

Ouch
Curiously Strong Press (out of print)

Peter Ackroyd Papers
Uncat. Ms. Vault 706 and 789
The Beinecke Library
Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

The Plato Papers: A Prophesy
Doubleday/Nan Talese, $21.95, 173 pp.

T. S. Eliot: A Life
Simon & Schuster (out of print)

the historical, with the architect of Hawksmoor's churches being reimagined as an orphan of the black plague, a victim of abuse, and a Satanic practitioner who builds churches on sacrifice-stained foundations to etch a pentagram on the very surface of London.

The sacred forms and rituals in which Ackroyd is steeped are recognizably Catholic, although he suggests that his religious sensibility has now taken the form of unhappiness with modern materialism. Still, he sometimes describes himself as a Catholic—an unorthodox one—whose writing is a form of prayer, and the Catholicism he was exposed to as a child shows up in partial disguises in his work. Moreover, he insists that the English tradition is a Catholic one still. "The Catholic sensibility of the English is innately strong," he told the literary critic Susana Onega. "Hence the interest in spectacle, hence the interest in pantomime, in display and vaudeville...the theatrical use of language, the interest in ritual, all these things stem from a Catholic sense of life."

Yet few of his subjects have been explicitly Catholic, and that makes Ackroyd's biographical treatment of More of particular interest. *The Life of Thomas More* contains a sympathetic depiction of late-medieval English piety, one that could be read as a useful supplement to Eamon Duffy's superb history of the period, *The Stripping of the Altars* (1992). In describing the consequences of More's conscientious objection to the policies of Henry VIII, Ackroyd invokes and laments the loss of a world of ritual, hierarchy, order, and tradition. Formal gestures of filial piety, rituals of official power, and the deference commanded by authority—in short, the last days of Catholic England—are presented respectfully. The crisis undergone by a power elite and establishment founded on medieval principles of hierarchy and cosmic order lies at the heart of the book.

Much of Ackroyd's imaginative life has been spent retracing and uncovering older versions of London still visible for benighted present-day readers. However, that keen historical sense doesn't stop him from playing fast and loose with the "facts" in his fiction. Historical distance makes melodramatic plots seem less incredible, Ackroyd has argued, and a juxtaposition of the present day with earlier periods helps reveal the unknowability of the present. Uninterested in multiculturalism and postcolonial writing, mistrustful of union with Europe, and actively hostile to the influence of American literature, he asserts that he is doing nothing new, and denounces originality and individuality as fetishes of Protestantism and post-Romantic modernity. Still, his playful opportunistic use of the past has led some critics to describe his novels as "historiographic metafictions" that are indebted to American experimental fiction, to Latin American magical realism, and to other postmodernist styles. Ackroyd stoutly denies this lineage. Of his seemingly postmodernist craft, Ackroyd told Onega, "No, it's English....This combination of high and low, farce and tragedy, is something which is innate in the English tradition....just part of the inheritance that

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goes back as far as a thousand years." He points to the romances of Philip Sidney (1554–86) and Edmund Spenser (1552–99) as primary influences.

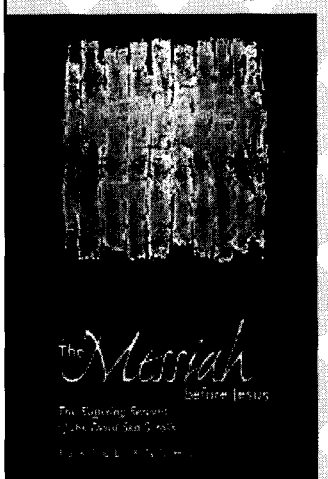
Consequently, the critic who offers an autobiographical explanation of Ackroyd's work is on shifty ground, for here is a gay man who does not want to be known as a gay writer, an author who disavows the cultivation of an authentic "voice," preferring to ventriloquize others. While much of Ackroyd's finest work is dedicated to the description of writers' and artists' lives, his fiction reveals relatively little of himself, or little undisguised. Still, it seems pertinent that Ackroyd's maternal grandfather was a van driver for Harrods and an active trade unionist who believed that a true Christian must be a socialist. His affection for London radicals and Cockney visionaries may spring from a source close to home. We might also note that the novels often feature fatherless boys (*Chatterton*, *Hawksmoor*), or boys with feckless dads (*Chatterton*, *The House of Doctor Dee*, *English Music*).

Peter Ackroyd was born in London in 1949. He was raised a Catholic by his mother, Audrey Whiteside Ackroyd, in East Acton, a working-class housing project. His father, Graham Ackroyd, left when Peter was six months old. (Though he corresponds with his father, Ackroyd has never cared to meet him.) He likes to note that he grew up in the shadow of Wormwood Scrubs prison, which adds a Dickensian flavor to an unexceptional childhood. To be sure, in the 1950s it was less common to be raised by a single parent, but Ackroyd was not deprived. Both mother and grandmother worked to support the family, and they managed to provide vacations to the continent for the young boy. Scholarships enabled him to attend Saint Benedict's (a Catholic day school in Ealing), Cambridge University, and Yale. Encouraged by his mother and the monks at Saint Benedict's, he steeped himself in books, the Latin Mass, and scholarship. At Cambridge he took a First in English; at Yale on fellowship he did the work for a precocious book of criticism, *Notes for a New Culture* (1976).

Returning to London from America in 1973 he became, at twenty-three, the literary editor and film critic for the *Spectator*; from 1978 to 1981 he was the magazine's joint managing editor. His early books were respectfully reviewed, but with *Hawksmoor* and *Chatterton* (1987, shortlisted for the Booker Prize) he caught the attention of academics. Critical accolades, big literary prizes, enormous advances, and long-term contracts for multiple books followed. Book-length studies of Ackroyd's oeuvre (by Onega, Laura Giovannelli, and Jeremy Gibson and Julian Wolfreys) have begun to appear. Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library acquired his voluminous papers for an undisclosed sum (Ackroyd sought £50,000).

The most recent novel, *The Plato Papers* (2000), offers a

RELIGIOUS HISTORY



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Harlem Rooftop

Across the roof
Bird-shadows fly;
The flash of glass
Is like a bird;
The singer in the court
Has made
A song that can't
Unsay the Word.

For wisdom playeth as a fountain
(Those who love her call her play)
She is a cave-trap in the mountain
To those who bridle from her way.

Above the roof
The white bird flies
Along the court
Her shadow runs.

In one light day is born and dies:
The night is dark with many suns.

And wisdom runneth as a flame
Above the rooftops of the mind,
Restoring every day the dead
And leading forth the halt and blind.

Down buildingside
Birdshadows rain,
And glass upflashes
Like a bird.

The singer in the court has made
A song that can't unsay the Word.

Robert Lax, *R.I.P., d. September 26, 2000*
Reprinted from Commonweal, *August 24, 1945.*

distillation of Ackroyd's views about time and history. Set in a future-world London, A.D. 3700, the novel is a fragmented fictive archive of orations, dialogues, dream-visions, and the working papers of its protagonist. Like his creator, Plato is fascinated by what can be gleaned from scattered bits of evidence, and he does not hesitate to fill in what he does not find. Ackroyd has often asserted that he does not distinguish between fiction and nonfiction. Novelists are biographers without imagination, Ackroyd quips; in biography you can make things up, whereas in fiction you have to tell the truth.

Plato studies the earlier periods of human life, including our Mouldwarp Era (A.D. 1500–2300), about which so much vital information has been lost. His "expert" teachings reveal the insufficiency of historical evidence, the likelihood of error in interpretations of the past, and the tenacity of the visionary imagination. One of the novel's cleverest features is Plato's glossary of ancient terms: "*ideology*: the process of making ideas. The work was generally performed in silence and solitude, since great care was needed in their manufacture. Certain artisans were chosen for this occupation at an early age and were trained in mental workhouses or asylums. They were known as idealists, and were expected to provide a fixed number of ideas to be exhibited or dramatized for the benefit of the public"; "*see red*: to see into the fire at the heart of all things"; "*telepathy*: the suffering caused by television." Charles Dickens is celebrated as the author of the great novel *The Origin of Species* (his only surviving work), Freud as the great comic genius of his age.

Thus Ackroyd demonstrates that a story will be made of the past, whether the facts survive to support it or not. At its best *The Plato Papers* gives us estranging glimpses, in the style of Craig Raine's poem "A Martian Sends a Postcard Home," of our own time: "Who can properly depict," Plato wonders, "the despair engendered by the cult of webs and nets which spread among the people in these final years? They seem to have worn these dismal garments as a form of enslavement as well as worship, as if their own darkness might thereby be covered and concealed." But as an exercise in future worldmaking, *The Plato Papers* is rather thin, and does not compare well either to Russell Hoban's linguistically inventive post-apocalyptic *Riddley Walker* (1980), or to Keith Roberts's lyrical depiction of a Catholic England, four centuries after the Spanish won the Armada, in *Pavane* (1968). Instead, the book offers a displaced *ars poetica* from a novelist steeped in the past and an apologia from a biographer whose *Dickens* (1993) envisioned the great novelist at play with his fictional characters.

Ackroyd has often suggested in interviews that his unwillingness to mine personal experience is purely practical—his own life is too boring to dwell upon. It is a writer's life, full of reading and hours of labor that are best encountered by reading the work. Surprisingly for a writer who later became so dedicated to an exclusively English tradition, he wrote a thesis on James Baldwin, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison. At college he became a poet, writing verse in the style of John Ashbery and Ashbery's English precursor J. H. Prynne. During his years at the *Spectator* he published more poetry, a book about transvestism and drag (*Dressing Up*, 1979), and his first biography (*Ezra Pound and His World*, 1980). Having embarked upon novel writing with *The Great Fire of London* (1982), he resigned his post at the *Spectator* in 1981, to become a full-time, self-supporting writer. While he worked on the critically acclaimed *Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1984, winner of the Somerset Maugham Prize) and his breakthrough biography, the prize-winning life of T. S. Eliot, Ackroyd kept pro-

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ducing book, film, and television reviews to pay the rent. He has conducted his career as a full-time writer with businesslike consistency. His work diaries (deposited at Yale's Beinecke Library) show a tireless and disciplined laborer.

Ackroyd is also a prodigious drinker, but this has not interfered with his productivity, though there were some bad times when his companion Brian Kuhn was dying. While at Yale in the early 1970s, Ackroyd met Kuhn, who would be his research assistant for the next two decades. Kuhn died of AIDS in 1994, after an illness of three years. Though Ackroyd is discreet about the relationship, he asserted in interviews after Kuhn's death that he wasn't worried about becoming ill himself, as their relationship had been companionate rather than sexual for fifteen years. The two had made two homes together, one in Notting Hill and the other a historic property in Devon; both were sold after Kuhn's death. There is further evidence of a long, loving union. Kuhn's letters to Ackroyd from the early days of their relationship can be found in the Beinecke papers. Some of these sheets have the texture of fine cloth, softened by handling. Ackroyd's biography of William Blake, dedicated to Kuhn, warmly portrays the visionary poet's wife Katherine as the helpmate who made Blake's work possible. Kuhn had cared for Ackroyd through a nervous breakdown in 1988; Ackroyd in turn fought the dreary battles for insurance coverage and humane treatment, and quietly nursed Kuhn until his death.

In recent work, Ackroyd has moved away from the horror and remorse of *Hawksmoor*. As the allegorical visions toward the end of *The House of Doctor Dee* make plain, love is the goal of existence. Light is its medium. Thus the older Ackroyd handily reverses the suggestions of *Hawksmoor*, deploying gothic elements to celebrate felt connections across time, the formation of true families of soul mates, and the healing of fractured relationships. In this romantic invented religion, the past has a restorative nature, capable of bringing on what Wordsworth described in "Tintern Abbey" as "that blessed mood, / In which the burthen of the mystery, / In which the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world, / Is lightened" (II. 37–41).

Arguably, Ackroyd needs something to help him escape the weary weight imposed by his grueling work routine. In the first interview granted after his heart attack, he told Francis Gilbert of the *New Statesman* that writing his biography of London very nearly killed him. The heart attack occurred on the day he finished the book. Ackroyd mused, "London has made my career—my most successful books all have the capital as their main theme—but it has exacted a very high price. Perhaps the city, which I regard as an organic being in its biography, wanted my death as a payment. Luckily it didn't cash the cheque. In a strange way, I think that the very last word of the biography helped to resurrect me. It's the Latin word *Resurgam*, which is what Christopher Wren made the centrepiece of Saint Paul's: I will arise again."

Though the deliberately blasphemous bantering might conceal it, this is a writer with a liturgical imagination that owes a great deal to his faith. Ackroyd may have jettisoned traditional Catholicism, but in his work humans are spiritual beings with souls that survive death and time. He speaks about writing and the imagination with a religious sensibility, adopting a priestly language of vocation. "I had begun in nature, where like an orphan I had looked for signs of a divine home among the dark material of the world, but now I had found my end in eternity," says Matthew Palmer, the narrator in the *House of Doctor Dee*. "This is no lost city under ground. The veil had been torn aside, and though the blazing stars had gone for ever, the light of the imagination filled every corner and every quarter, every street and every house, of this place from which I had come and to which I had returned. The imagination is the spiritual body, and it exists eternally."

Though the deliberately blasphemous bantering might conceal it, this is a writer with a liturgical imagination that owes a great deal to his faith. Ackroyd may have jettisoned traditional Catholicism, but in his work humans are spiritual beings with souls that survive death and time.

If professional researchers like his character Matthew Palmer feel "at odds with the rest of the world," they are also "travelling backwards" on behalf of the rest of us, who are stuck moving forward. A lifetime of reading becomes a kind of sacrifice of and to time. Asking "What is the past, after all?" Ackroyd hopefully votes for the combination of discovery and invention that comes out of the act of writing, "discovering it within myself, so that it bears both the authenticity of surviving evidence and the immediacy of present intuition." Ackroyd labors among his books to enliven connections to the past that shares space with the present. Like the Renaissance mage Doctor Dee, he strives to distill his reading and synthesize knowledge through the alchemy of authorship. □

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Rand Richards Cooper

DARK & DARKER

'Dancer in the Dark' & 'Get Carter'

Few directors of late have sparked such vehement opinion as Lars von Trier, whose new film, *Dancer in the Dark*, won both cheers and jeers this year at Cannes. Von Trier's oeuvre includes *The Kingdom*, a creepy, Stephen King-like series for Danish television about a haunted hospital; *Zentropa*, a hypnotic and surreal trip into postwar Germany; and *Breaking the Waves*, with Emily Watson as a passionate naif who immolates herself on her husband's sadistic will. Von Trier is a director born for auteur theory. His films bear a signature stamp of harshness and lyricism, and are curiously assaultive of their audience, inducing powerful dream-like states of joy and then violently undercutting them.

Dancer in the Dark follows a Czech immigrant named Selma (played by the Icelandic pop singer, Björk), who's stuck in a life of misery in Washington State in LBJ-era America. A single mother suffering a degenerative eye disease, she's going blind, and working double shifts in a steel-pressing plant to save for an eye operation for her similarly afflicted son. The film was actually shot in Sweden (von Trier doesn't fly), and makes only the most perfunctory stab at hiding its non-American settings and accents. But no matter, because von Trier soon makes clear that realism isn't exactly the program. Selma loves Broadway musicals, and escapes the backbreaking drudgery of her life through daydreams that transform the world around her into music and dance. "I've got little games I play when it's hard," she says to her would-be suitor, Jeff (Peter Stomare). "In the factory, the machines, they've got rhythms." In her imagination she starts to sing, and when others join in, *Dancer in the Dark* turns, against all odds, into a musical.

Von Trier is a leading member of the Dogma 95 movement, a group of Danish filmmakers who pledged themselves to ten cinematic "vows of chastity"—handheld cameras, natural sound and lighting, no extravagant props or costumes, and so on. Dogma 95 productions include Soren Kragh-Jacobsen's *Mifune* and Thomas Vinterberg's *The Celebration*, but its influence extends all the way to such homegrown films as *The Blair Witch Project*. Applying its rather severe principles to von Trier's own lavishly fantastic sensibility makes for a weird blend of aestheticism and asceticism. *Dancer* begins with a gorgeous abstract color show—shifting shapes of color set to swelling orchestral music—then abruptly dumps us into Dogma 95 reality mode. The camera wanders from face to face, like a home movie, and the film has a grainy, pale look, as if shot at precisely that point of dimming light where objects begin to lose their color: the look of incipient blindness, in other words.

Off-off-Broadway

Except during the musical numbers. Each time von Trier segues into one of Selma's musical dream sequences, *Dancer in the Dark* makes a *Wizard of Oz*-like shift into brilliant color. Selma sings and dances, performing pop arias (written by Björk and von Trier) of sorrow and hope—sparkly wish fulfillments in which a dead man rises and walks again, Selma's tormentors turn into comforters, and "there's always someone to catch me." Those who have wronged her and those she has wronged join together in literal choruses of forgiveness.

It's outrageous and incredibly campy, all these machine operators suddenly turned into whirling dancers—and it would be funny, if von Trier let it. But he doesn't; the splashes of color and soaring lyrics never entirely distract us from the underlying beat of doom. *Dancer in the Dark* has an absurdly melodramatic plot, involving a killing and subsequent trial, that's as trumped-up as any musical, but morbid in the extreme; it makes Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* seem like a walk in the park, with Selma croaking "My Favorite Things" in a death-row cellblock. I won't reveal more of the ending except that it gives the most macabre twist to "Listen to your heart" in the annals of film. Von Trier takes grotesque ironies and puns, and plays them straight, manipulating events toward gallows humor—literally—and then refusing to let you laugh.

Like Emily Watson in *Breaking the Waves*, Björk as Selma projects a childlike, oblivious joy. There's a poignant sweetness to her—she thanks the boss who fires her—and she's incapable of anger, even when betrayed (though she reacts with sudden animal violence when backed into a corner.) Such vulnerability is hard to watch, and—again as in *Breaking the Waves*—von Trier pushes his heroine along a curve of

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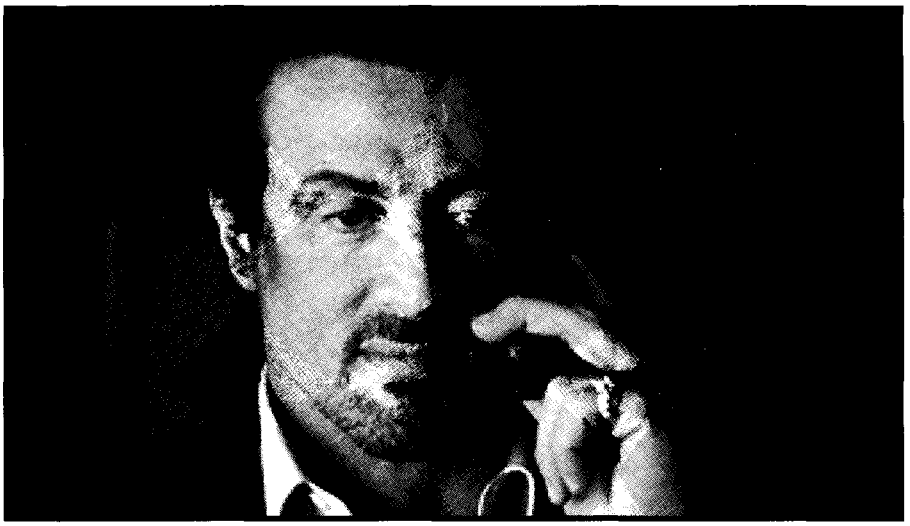
events so inexorable that a fatalistic mood seeps in from the start. All his movies feature a central death, and are suffused by a harsh, glowing religiosity less Christian than pagan; they have the feel of a sacrifice, a public spectacle with all the attendant energies of ecstasy, bloodlust, and dread.

Dancer in the Dark is an outlandish movie, turning camp into catharsis and fashioning a bizarre testament to the power of imagination in the face of suffering. People speak of von Trier as a love-him-or-hate-him director, but to me it's love him and hate him. He's maddening but fascinating, not in the least because he's so willfully contradictory—placing himself in the aesthetic handcuffs of an austere dogma and then somehow wriggling his way out, Houdini style, into this film. As with any escape artist, the illusion will work to his advantage, as long as we're asking, "How did he do that?" and not "Why?"



No Michael Caine

Where *Dancer in the Dark* puts the musical to a wild array of ironic uses, Stephen Kay's *Get Carter* gives us another sturdy genre, film noir, and asks no more than that we sit back and bask in its tough-guy sorrows and shadows. The opening credits cite a novel by Ted Lewis, *Jack's Return Home*, but the ghost presence here is British director Mike Hodges's 1971 cult classic, *Get Carter*, which starred Michael Caine as Jack Carter (Sylvester Stallone has the role this time 'round), a gang enforcer come home to solve his brother's mysterious death and rack up a few badly needed redemption points for himself in the process.

Caine has a supporting role in the new film, and to see him as the recipient of hard-bitten lines he uttered three decades ago ("You're a big man, but you're out of shape and with me it's a full-time job, so sit down") makes for a nice nod of homage. Indeed, *Get Carter* faithfully serves up the elements of film noir. Rain-drenched streets at night; a hopelessly knotty plot; furious car chases; various scumbags crawling out from under various rocks (including Mickey Rourke as a smirking pornographer); cigarettes everywhere, and sunglasses, and mirrors—harsh reflections and oblique camera angles that suggest trouble lurking around every corner. The film is lighted in a metallic blue murk so dark, you feel like tearing off all those sunglasses in sheer frustration.

And yet despite hitting every touchstone, *Get Carter* misses the noir sensibility, and does so spectacularly. There's a cynical, mean-streets-hero intelligence—the Humphrey Bogart quality, if you will—that's absent, and without it the film veers between brutal and maudlin. Stallone lumbers through scene after scene, his massive frame shrink-wrapped in sky-blue suits with gleaming silk ties, his face decorated with scars and a Frankie Valli-style goatee. It isn't just a looks problem, either. "Did you ever wanna take every mirror in the world and get rid of it," he intones at one point, "'cause you didn't like what was coming back at you?" Caine's Carter would utter such words in an unguarded moment, then quickly hustle away from them, but Stallone plays his role with hangdog sorrow, as if pleading for a bone of sympathy. Kay and his screenwriter, David McKenna, violate noir's rule of allowing you only a peek, a dodging inference, at its hero's suffering soul. Maybe we're too needy for that by now, too hooked on pathos. This is noir for the age of Oprah.

Screen violence has changed since 1971 as well, and the current *Get Carter* is far more vicious, in a pumped-up, steroidal way, than the original. That too is a problem. Caine's menace emanated not from a WWF-sized body, but from inner layers of calculation and detachment, and a studied capacity for cruelty. His Carter hinted at literary origins (at the start he sat on a train reading Raymond Chandler)—the antihero as closet philosopher, whose fists and gun aren't just wreaking havoc with other people's bodies, but scoring points in an existential argument. Stallone's Carter, on the other hand, comes off as a mere thug. "You sit here and shut your mouth," he snarls, "or this is going to the next level."

Stallone can be a good-enough actor, but if a film doesn't land right in the narrow band of what he can do well, he's in trouble. Actually, *Get Carter* reminds you how effective he was as Rocky Balboa—the earnest inarticulateness, the sweet soul trapped inside that almost grotesque body. Rocky was not film noir, however, and Stallone seems laughably incapable of playing a character who's thinking on several levels at once; he gives the impression of having trouble with just one. Intelligence was what kept the original *Get Carter* moving, both its script and its star. Michael Caine was smart—quick enough on his feet to figure out a crime, outrun the bad guys, and keep tabs on the perilous state of his own soul. Stallone's Carter, on the other hand, is a plodder. He makes us pity him; and on the mean streets of a darkened theater, that's the deadliest error of all. □

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Richard Alleva

ON SCREEN, BILL'S BETTER SELF

Hollywood's would-be president

As William Jefferson Clinton's presidency draws to a close, I've been thinking a lot about William Wilson.

Wilson, a creation of Edgar Allan Poe, is a cad pursued down the years and over European borders by his virtuous doppelgänger. To be plagued by a normal doppelgänger—a supernatural humanoid who looks exactly like you, assumes your name, and wants to replace you—must be annoying enough, but a virtuous doppelgänger! who wants to help you become a better person!! This moralistic stalker, this supreme party pooper, first exposes poor evil Wilson as a cardsharp at college. Then, reportedly, he "thwarted my ambition at Rome, my revenge at Paris, my passionate love at Naples...my avarice in Egypt." Nag, nag, nag. The climax of the tale makes clear what we have already surmised, that Paragon Wilson is Malefactor Wilson's conscience. But, earlier in the story, a subtler idea was suggested: "I secretly felt that I feared him, and could not help thinking the equality which he maintained so easily with myself, a proof of his true superiority; since not to be overcome cost me a perpetual struggle." In his heart, the scoundrel finds virtue more powerful than evil, and knows the doppelgänger to be the imaged sum of his own best possibilities.

Therefore, let us pity President Clinton who has had not one but several virtuous doppelgängers pursuing him and seeking to shame him in thousands of cities throughout this country, and in a few overseas, too. Nor is there any anodyne in the fact that his phantom doubles chase him not through the three-dimensional world we breathe in but only across movie screens and TV monitors, for our chief executive knows better than anybody that Image rules. And should he turn on his doubles, as the maddened William Wilson turned on his, and slay them, he would not be killing his own conscience but only the embodied disappointment felt by an entertainment industry located in a town of dreams situated within a city of angels.

"Right!"

Why the disappointment?

Hollywood invariably supports liberal candidates, but Clinton suggested during his 1992 campaign that he would go further than most in ending discrimination against gays, fostering programs to cure AIDS, improving the health-care system, promoting women's rights, maintaining the legality of abortion, ending the embargo on Cuba, and countering tyrannies around the world—all heroic measures in the eyes of Hollywood. On a less quantifiable level, Clinton's "style" seemed right to Hollywood. I mean, which of the following Democrats would look most at ease schmoozing with Barbra, Sharon, Alec: Jimmy Carter, Michael Dukakis, or Bill Clinton? And the rumors and gossip about Clinton's private life only served to confirm his image as someone hip enough for Hollywood, though of course that private life would have to stay private for the rest of the country.

Eight years of "triangulation" later, the president presides over an economy that seems a cornucopia and a Democratic Party that bears a striking resemblance to a slightly liberalized Republican Party (a party that, say, Nelson Rockefeller would feel at home in). But most of his more radical promises have floated away into the ether, and his private life is not only exposed but made an object of ridicule in the monologues of talk-show hosts. How does Clinton now stand with Hollywood liberals?

The answer may be found Wednesday nights at 9 P.M. on NBC, and it's called "The West Wing," created by the writer Aaron Sorkin (*A Few Good Men*). Not a movie à clef or a satire or a celebration of the Clinton presidency, the series is, for all its slickness and snap and vigor, a sigh of regret over what

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the Clinton presidency might have been. It is a loving rebuke, and here is how it is made: the show's "president," Josiah Bartlet (played by Martin Sheen with unshakable dignity) is Bill Clinton's ideological doppelgänger but in every other way seems to be Clinton's opposite. It's as if Sorkin were speculating that Clinton's agenda could only be realized if his character and domestic circumstances were reversed.

Bartlet's wife is a supremely liberated, politically canny woman, but she never serves as her husband's hatchet woman. Why should she? She has her own career away from politics. His daughter is a college-bound young lady who sometimes gets annoyed at her father's fussing but knows she will never read a scandalous story about him in the newspapers. And why would she? Bartlet is as privately virtuous as he is politically progressive. On his staff is a political consultant, not a promiscuous cynic named Dick Morris but a strong and scrupulous woman played by Moira Kelly (fresh from playing strong and scrupulous Dorothy Day on the big screen). Rob Lowe as the deputy communications director, with his fresh-faced youthfulness and idealism, may suggest George Stephanopoulos, but this is a Stephanopoulos never so outraged by and alienated from his boss that he would write a memoir denouncing him. And why would he? Having at first compromised his liberal principles to appease the right-wing opposition and unable to sleep at nights because of this, Bartlet, in the hinge episode of last season, announces a new, unabashedly liberal agenda while his staff beams with pride and pledges "to serve at the pleasure of the president."

And how does America, the America that once elected Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, react to this purified, uncompromised liberal program? It loves it! Everybody loves it! The president's approval rating skyrockets. Republican senators fume but mainstream Americans support Bartlet unabashedly.

This is not political naiveté on Sorkin's part but show business savvy. He knows that Americans are perfectly willing to embrace political figures in fiction who might

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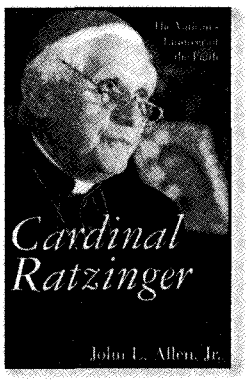

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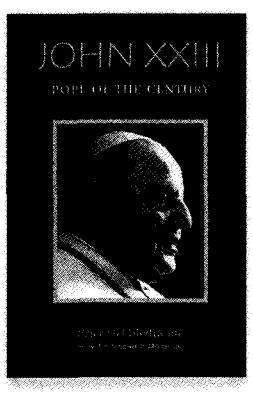

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His Solitude

He's been cleaning the pen after the pigs have gone—
Early November—and at the fall of night
Turning towards home he sees—for the leaves have gone
From the trees across the valley—a single light

Where there never has been a glimmer of light till now,
Nothing to look at but the wash of trees
The length of the valley, and he remembers how
Reports from the south were carried on the breeze

All summer to stun him, lugging buckets of grain
Up to the pigs, thwack of a gun, of an axe,
But it wasn't a gun or an axe, again, again,
Thwack and thwack of a hammer as it thwacks

Square on the head of a nail to drive it tight
To coffin or clapboard; and now this speck in his eye
He can't blink away, this asterisk in the night
To footnote his solitude: *Not till you die.*

Charles W. Pratt

give them pause in real life. They favor strong, decisive heroes regardless of the politics that decisiveness serves. Bartlet, outmaneuvering his right-wing enemies, is like President Harrison Ford punching out the terrorists in *Air Force One*.

Sex, the roiling distraction and near-derailment of the Clinton administration, is nowhere near the center of "The West Wing," with its conjugally irreproachable president and workaholic staffers (who are the show's real heroes). But another Sorkin project, the film that now seems the prototype of "The West Wing," *The American President*, directed by Rob Reiner, has sexual romance at its heart. Here, the president (Michael Douglas), an unphilandering widower, has an affair with an environmental activist, an *emotionally mature, highly intelligent, young-middle-aged* woman (Annette Benning). The italicized words in the last sentence indicate what a pleasant alternative to real life this movie has turned out to be. But in the early nineties, when Sorkin wrote the script, *President* was probably not intended as purely escapist entertainment. Sorkin and Reiner, who must have heard rumblings of the scandals to come (at least by the time they came to shoot the film) seemed to be attempting two things: (1) warn the public that the enemies of democracy (that is, right-wing Republicans) would try to pull down Clinton with charges of sexual immorality; and (2) give a pep talk to Clinton about following through on his 1992 campaign promises. Certainly, when President Michael Douglas does follow through, his approval ratings skyrocket, etc., etc. If wishes were presidential limousines, Hollywood geniuses would ride.

Even nongeniuses would, judging by the dopey but highly rated TV movie, *Running Mates*, that TNT offered as an alternative to the real conventions last summer. This nonsense had campaign financing reform on its very dim mind, with presidential nominee Tom Selleck forced to choose as his running mate either a crusading McCain type or a grotesquely glowering villain-senator who is the paladin of the PACs. Naturally, Selleck seems about to cave in to Senator Evil but changes his mind during his acceptance speech and hauls the open-mouthed McCain stand-in up on the dais as the entire audience of delegates bellows, "AMERICA IS NOT FOR SALE."

There was one half-decent scene in which the four women Selleck has slept with—wife, campaign manager, political dowager, Hollywood fundraiser—get together in the ladies' room lounge to dish, defend, and dissect the man they have in common. This chitchat—bitchy but accepting, faintly scurrilous but jovial—was yet another example of Hollywood wishfulness. These four classy ladies were as much the filmmakers' replacements for Ms. Flowers and Ms. Lewinsky as Tom Selleck was the virtuous, reproving doppelgänger for Bill Clinton. Sure, President-to-be Selleck slept around—but not with scandal-divulging bimbos. If wishes were limousines...

But such wishfulness seems to pay off at the box office and in the ratings. When *Primary Colors*, a hardheaded, funny movie evincing hardly any wishfulness at all, was released, the impeachment proceedings were imminent and perhaps the public was so revulsed by reality that it decided that no fictionalized adumbration of the whole mess, however clever, was needed.

If President Clinton saw *Primary Colors*, I'm sure he liked it, especially John Travolta's portrayal of the Clinton stand-in Jack Stanton as "a man so confident of his skills and, even more so, of his destiny that he feels licensed to risk self-destruction" (to quote my own review of the movie). Oscar Wilde was right about Caliban's rage for seeing himself in the mirror. But what if the president saw *Running Mates* and *The American President* or watches "The West Wing" on a regular basis? What does he make of these virtuous, reproving doppelgängers? Does he smile ruefully or sarcastically when he watches? Does he shake his head at the noble, straightforward choices made by these heroes? Or...is he like William Wilson who found deep in his heart a poignant attraction toward the imaged sum of his own best possibilities? □

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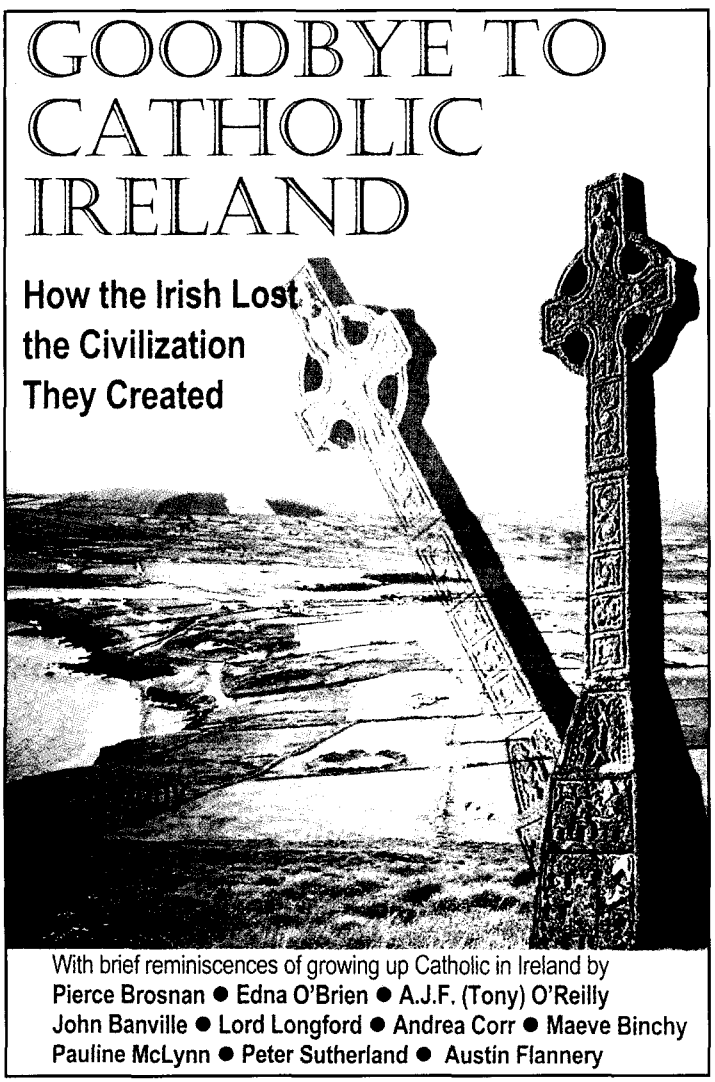
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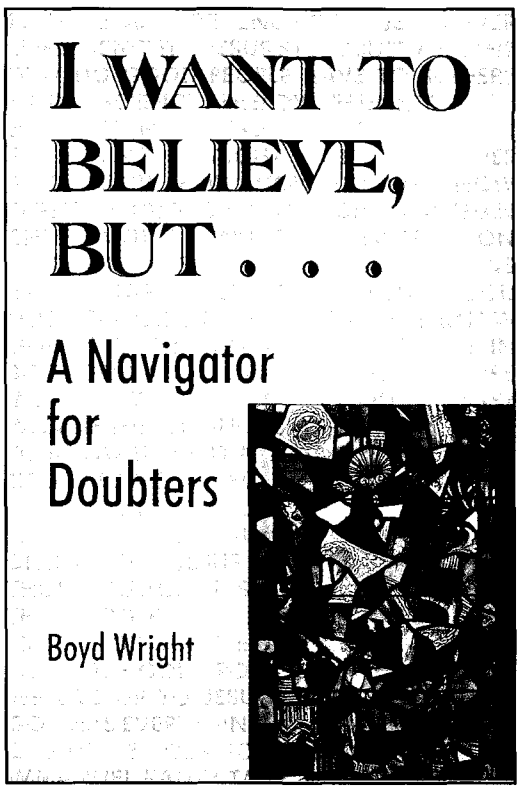

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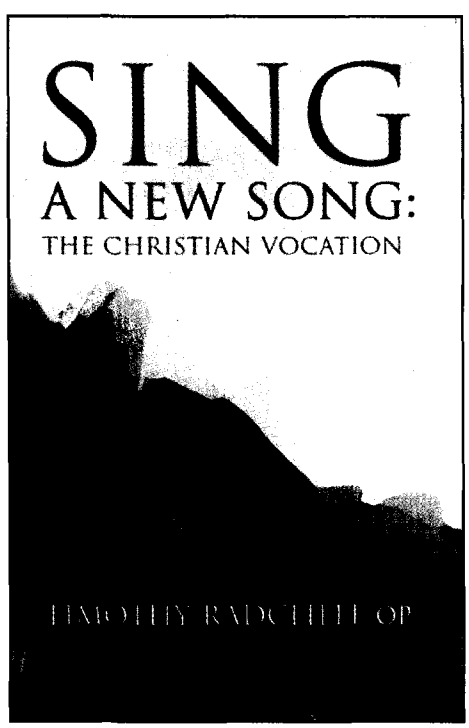

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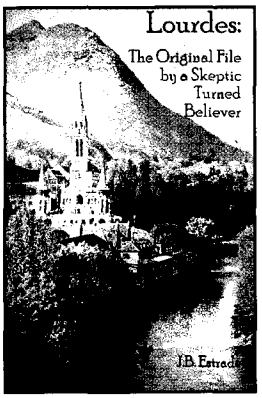

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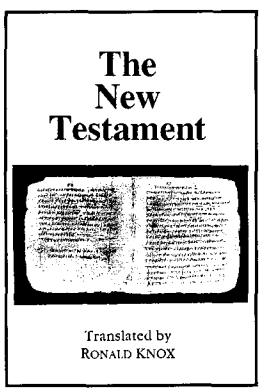

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The aunt is Edith Stein who was murdered at Auschwitz. The niece and author, Susanne Batzdorff, is an observant Jew and was a guest of honor at her aunt's canonization in Rome in October 1998.

Edith Stein was the daughter of a proud German Jewish family. After a spectacular academic career she became the principal associate of Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology. At the age of thirty, after a chance reading of the life of Teresa of Avila, to the anguish of her family and many of her friends she became a Roman Catholic. Eleven years later she became a Carmelite nun. In 1942 she and her sister Rosa were taken from their convent and deported to Auschwitz where they perished in the gas chambers. Illustrated with twenty photographs.

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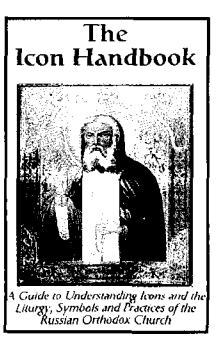

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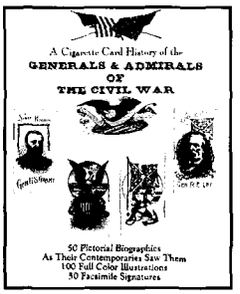

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Whodunit?

When We Were Orphans
Kazuo Ishiguro
Knopf, $25, 335 pp.

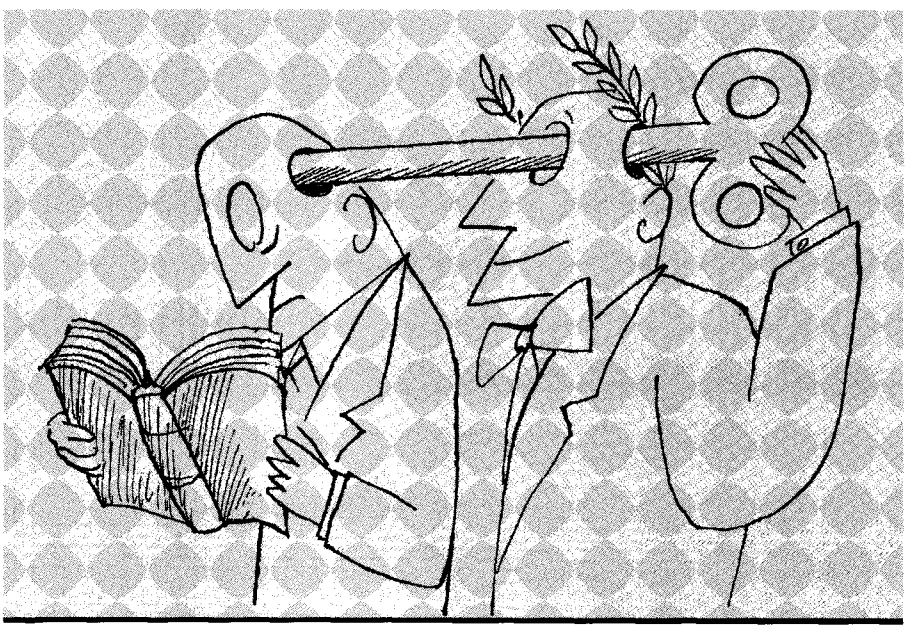
Alice McDermott

This intriguing and maddening novel is a curious amalgam of detective mystery, period romance, and fictional memoir. Much like the author's highly acclaimed *The Remains of the Day*, it is a story told by a detached first-person narrator, a British gentleman of little emotion and great potential for self-delusion. Much like Ishiguro's most recent work, *The Unconsoled*, it at times takes on an anxious, nightmarish quality that distorts and obscures the intentions of both the characters and the author. *When We Were Orphans* is, by turns, brilliant and dull, absorbing and unfathomable, fascinating and a bit of a mess.

Christopher Banks is a renowned detective in London between the wars, a Sherlock Holmes type who solves high-profile murders with a magnifying glass. Just how he comes to his renown, or his expertise, is somewhat uncertain, but he shares with the reader the roots of his "calling," "a calling I've felt my whole life," through his recollections of his childhood in Shanghai. In a marvelous display of Ishiguro's gifts as a storyteller, Banks recalls his charmed boyhood in China, where his father is an employee of a British firm secretly involved in the opium trade and his beautiful young mother is an outspoken opponent of that involvement. When Christopher's father simply vanishes one morning on the way to work, Christopher and his Japanese friend Akira begin to center their imaginary games around this mysterious turn of events, pretending to be detectives and reenacting, again and again, the liberation of Christopher's father from the kidnappers they believe are holding him nearby. Some weeks later, Christopher is taken into the city by Uncle Phillip, a beloved family friend, and suddenly abandoned there. When he finds his way home, he discovers his mother has disappeared as well. Thus, Banks's determination "to check the spread of crime and evil wherever it has manifested itself" has its foundation in the unsolved mystery of his tragic childhood.

But these events, like all the events in the novel, are told in retrospect—sometimes from the distance of only hours, sometimes from a great many years—and Banks makes it clear again and again that he is well aware of the fragility of recollection. He tells the reader, describing his first encounter with London society, "I am sure this same agitated frame of mind accounts for the fact that when I now think back to that evening so many aspects seem somewhat exaggerated or unnatural." And again, as he recalls his childhood, "Even tonight, when I sat down here and tried to gather in some sort of order these things I still remember, I have been struck anew by how hazy so much of it has grown."

This uncertainty, this sense of distortion, begins to bear heavily on the events of the novel in its second half when Banks at long last returns to Shanghai to solve not only the mystery of his parents' disappearance, but, it would seem, the dilemma of the Sino-Japanese conflict and the approaching worldwide conflagration as well. "Do you have any idea at all how relieved we all feel now that you're finally with us?" a European lady asks him on his arrival. And when the woman he has loved for years invites him to leave Shanghai with her he tells her, "The whole world's on the brink of catastrophe. What would people think of me if I abandoned them all at this stage?"



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Convinced that his parents are indeed being held by kidnappers in a house much like the one he had imagined as a child, Banks moves through a war-torn section of the city, determined to liberate them. This appears not to be merely a matter of self-delusion. English officials in Shanghai also seem to recognize the universal importance of Banks's case, even making plans for the celebration of his parents' return at a public park. A Chinese officer leaves his command post in the midst of a fierce battle with the Japanese in order to help guide Banks toward the house where his parents are held, acknowledging as he does the importance of Banks's quest.

On this hallucinatory journey through the ravaged, labyrinthine streets of Shanghai—another instance of Ishiguro's marvelous descriptive powers—Banks encounters a wounded Japanese soldier he believes to be Akira, his old childhood friend. Dragging the soldier along, Banks at last enters the house where he thinks his parents have been hidden for decades, only to find it mostly destroyed, and littered with the bodies of a Chinese family. A lone survivor, a small girl, strokes a wounded dog. "'Look, really,' Banks tells her, 'you're being awfully brave...You may not know who I am, but, as it happens, I'm...well, I'm just the person you want. I'll see to it they don't get away....' I now found my magnifying glass and showed it to her."

What the reader is to make of all this is not immediately clear. Certainly Ishiguro is delineating, as he has done in his previous work, the convergence of private and public grief, the essential—and essentially flawed—role of both collective and individual memory, and the human capacity for self-delusion. But he seems to undermine his own seriousness of intent with stylistic strokes that at times are so broad they reduce the novel to cartoon. The novel's denouement, a parody of the detective story's summarizing finale, features a full confession by an all-but-moustache-twirling evildoer (he actually says, "Oh yes, I desired her"), a revelation straight out of *Great Expectations* ("So all this time, I've been living...I've been living off..."), and a pistol pressed to a waistcoat with the injunction, "Here, boy. You can kill me. No one else should have that privilege."

For a novel that has in places enlisted both the reader's sympathy and intellect, and appears to attempt to do so again in its final chapters, this broadly drawn summing up is an unfortunate choice on the author's part, a dismissal of the human element of his tale in favor of the stylistic. It is, perhaps, the danger any writer encounters when choosing a narrator who himself fails to recognize or understand the implications of his own narrative: the reader may, ultimately, not recognize those implications either. Which is a shame. There is an authentic, complex, and intelligent story contained in this novel. A little less self-consciousness on the author's part, a little less self-delusion on the narrator's, might have given the reader fuller access to it. □

Alice McDermott's *last novel,* Charming Billy, *won the National Book Award.*

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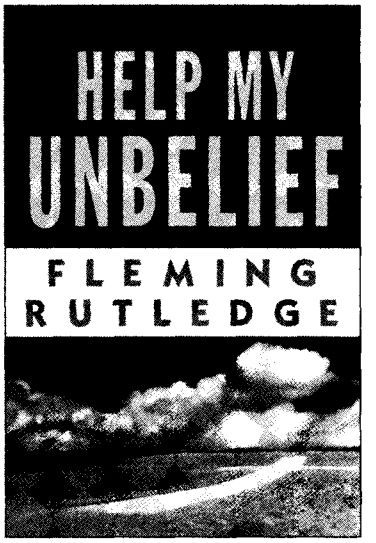

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TATTLETALE

Cherry
Mary Karr
Viking, $24.95, 276 pp.

Valerie Sayers

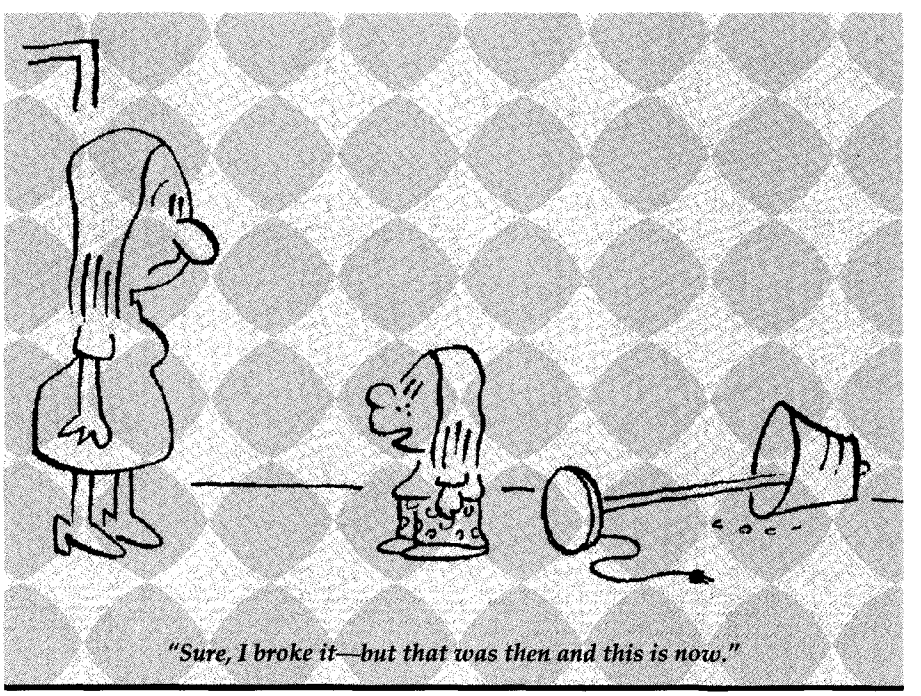
Mary Karr has now written two narratives of her childhood, which can stand as Exhibits A and B in the Case of the Contemporary Memoir. Past evidence suggests that we are a nation of first-person narrators, confessing our own sordid histories while we peek in on the neighbors' stories. We don't often invoke our right to privacy—on the contrary, we're ready to spill all—and we certainly don't seem overly concerned with the privacy of lives that have intersected ours.

The literary memoirist may operate on a slightly higher plane than the talk-show exhibitionist, but faces the same dangers: the seductions of self-justification, self-aggrandizement, self-absorption, self-delusion. I am happy to report that in both accounts of her early life, Karr's writing tends toward the generous impulse, not the selfish. She gives her all in language, empathy, and forgiveness—but she is not above a little titillation. Both memoirs rely on a sexy, suggestive narrative come-on, yet their conclusions about sex and all human intimacy are thoughtful.

Karr's first memoir, *The Liars' Club*, was a long-standing bestseller and brought her to prominence. The story of Karr's upbringing in East Texas (and briefly in Colorado), *The Liars' Club* is told in a bemused, humorous voice. It is a litany of sorrows, beginning with her flamboyant parents' alcoholism, progressing through two chilling accounts of sexual abuse, and ending with the uncovering of the great secret of her mother's early adulthood. The title and the central motif—her father's embellishing of his own life story for the sake of his drinking buddies—ask readers to consider the ways the narrator may be tailoring the story to fit her own needs. Much of *The Liars' Club* is told in a swaggering Texas drawl, which doubtless adds to its popular appeal but which strikes me as oddly coquettish. Karr is a poet who writes beautiful, bracing lines, but throughout both memoirs she gives her childhood self a precocious way with words that hovers in that realm between fancification and falsification. In *The Liars' Club*, for instance, she has her seven-year-old self "screaming to Carol Sharp that her Jesus was a mewling dipshit"; in *Cherry*, Mary, age six, receives a mash note that says, "If you play nasty with me, I'll like you for one year." Perhaps both lines are reported verbatim, but the neat way they fit into the narrative's design makes me wonder. Karr herself is amused by the way we reconstruct our childhood selves: "In actual written artifacts from my past, I sound way less smart than I recall having been."

Cherry focuses on Karr's sexual coming of age. I dislike the title, a cheap bright lipstick smeared on the book's face, promising another lurid tell-all that isn't exactly forthcoming. Though Karr is frank about her early sexual experiences and desires, her book integrates her intellectual and social coming-of-age with her sexual self-discovery, and takes seriously all the struggles entailed. Hers is the story of the bright girl in the small town, observing the way her bright parents trapped themselves in lives that can't contain their longings.

For the purposes of this second exploration, Karr shifts her voice to a second-person narrative. This addressing of the self as another person (a device I'd hoped had been left behind in the '80s) is obviously supposed to signify the distance between the present narrator and the past subject, but it comes across as mannered here. It's a small enough mannerism. Though the book opens with a bad-girl, listen-to-me-talk-dirty tone, it settles into the kind of sharp observation that evokes not just one little girl's life but a whole American era, in which Mary Karr's (and my) generation replaces alcohol with psychedelics, early marriage with early sex and birth control pills. The ensuing road trip leads, often as not, to jail, suicide, and disaster for Karr's childhood friends.



"Sure, I broke it—but that was then and this is now."

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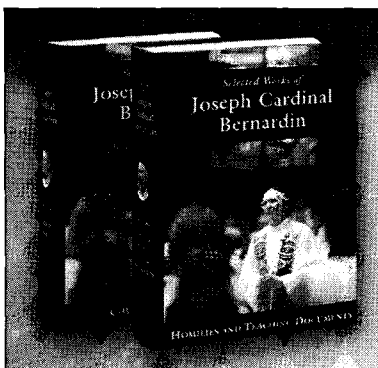

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The oddest disjunction in *Cherry* concerns the abuse depicted in *The Liars' Club*. The earlier passages—describing Karr's rape at seven by a teenage neighbor, and her abuse by a babysitter at twelve—are stark and distant, removed in precisely the way we might expect. In *Cherry*, those early events are not acknowledged until well into the narrative, and their evocations are parenthetical: "(Undercurrent: a boy in the dark bucking over your seven-year-old body....)." As a teenager, after she sleeps with her boyfriend for the first time, another pair of parentheses appear: "(How odd, you'll later think, that you embarked on your first love affair—meant as an intimacy—with such a large sexual secret in tow.)" The lack of analysis is completely understandable, but the presentation of these events as afterthoughts in a young woman's sexual re-initiation underscores the difficulties of our confessional age: there are still events so painful that they resist the unveiling of the self. Perhaps the sexual woundings reveal themselves in other ways; there's a crude recurring phrase used in this book, about what it is that boys are chasing, that reflects the hurt in an offhand, even unconscious, way.

In any case, *Cherry*'s greatest strength is not its revelation of self but its recognition of others. Karr offers up loving depictions: of her childhood genius friend, Meredith; of the nonjudgmental surfer boys whose communalism appears, however briefly, utopian. She holds herself to a high standard of responsibility, and her deep empathy for family and friends leads her to question her commitment to them. Years after watching a girlfriend cut herself, she asks: "Couldn't you have told someone? Or just left the room? Surely witness is tacit approval." This memoir, and the one that precedes it, become the opportunities to "tell someone." At their best, both offer witness and the kind of introspective questioning of self that can be instructive to even the voyeurs among us. □

Valerie Sayers, *professor of English at the University of Notre Dame, is the author of five novels.*

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YE OF LITTLE FAITH

God's Name in Vain
The Wrongs and Rights of Religion in Politics
Stephen L. Carter
Basic Books, $26, 256 pp.

Alan Wolfe

A deeply committed Christian believes that homosexuality is a sin. He is also a landlord. May he deny an apartment to a gay couple? In 1996, the U.S. Supreme Court let stand an Alaska Supreme Court decision which ruled that he cannot. When the law of the state forbidding discrimination comes into conflict with what some people consider the laws of God forbidding wanton fornication, the state's side, Stephen Carter argues in his new book, invariably wins.

Because it does, many religious believers by no means all Christian, let alone conservative, have come to feel that their views are treated with contempt in modern America. Carter is right to point out that they have reason to do so. While America's jurisprudence around church and state is something of a mess, many judges have come to accept that the First Amendment requires the creation of an isolation chamber between politics and faith.

Such a view, in Carter's opinion, is bad policy, if for no other reason than its lack of understanding of what faith requires. "Religion," he writes, "has no sphere. It possesses no natural bounds. It is not amenable to being pent up. It sneaks through cracks, creeps through half-open doors—it flows over walls." The religious sensibility is a prophetic sensibility; to use theologian David Tracy's term, it "resists." By seeking too much involvement in politics, people of faith lose the ability to be witnesses for their beliefs. Carter admires Fanny Lou Hamer, the civil-rights activist. Hoping to buy off possible protest at the 1964 Democratic convention, Lyndon Johnson sent Hubert Humphrey to ask what Hamer wanted. "The beginning of a New Kingdom, right here on earth" was her reply.

Carter, a professor of law at Yale and author of several well-received books, including *The Culture of Disbelief* (1993), does not actually develop a theory upon which judges could rely to produce a jurisprudence more respectful of faith. His book instead ought to be read as a prologue to any such theory, an attempt to clear some space by reminding readers that any society needs to listen to religious voices. Alas, the way he constructs his argument makes one wonder whether any guidelines can ever be found to accommodate religious convictions within a liberal and pluralistic society. For in presenting extreme, and unrealistic, accounts of what faith requires and the state demands, Carter leaves little or no room for the two to live together in peace.

"Religion that is not pure in its fidelity to its vision of truth, religion that is unfaithful begins to lose its distinctively religious character and becomes much like everything else," Carter writes. But what exactly does fidelity to truth mean? Once upon a time, a Lutheran conception of truth was wildly incompatible with a Catholic one; now, Lutherans and Catholics are reconciling their differences. Has either side been unfaithful or lost its distinctively religious character? The Catholic church once insisted on Latin, but now it welcomes the vernacular; is it any less Catholic? Even conservative Protestants who insist on the literal truth of the Bible have begun to accept more sophisticated hermeneutics.

"It all started when I decided to take responsibility for my own life..."

Visions of the truth constantly change, and among the reasons they do are purely practical ones, including the very commercial (a desire to attract more members) and the very political (a desire to gain the ears of rulers, whether tyrants in the past or public opinion in an age of democracy). Faith resists, to be sure, and one of the things it resists is obsolescence. Carter argues that religion knows no boundaries, yet he tries to draw a border around religion as if it were a realm of existence untainted by sin. That very effort suggests a particularly Protestant view of faith and politics, one best represented, as Carter shows, by Roger Williams's contrast between the garden of faith and the wilderness of the larger world. If it is true, as Carter argues, that the state can never be neutral between faith and nonfaith, it is also the case that no neutrality is possible between one faith and another. Nonetheless, respect for faith in general ought to include respect for a Catholic tradition that relies on the state to promote the common good as well as Jewish tradition that emphasizes a level of separation sharper than Carter's own.

Not only is religion pure, in Carter's view, the state is corrupt. The desire of the American state to see children educated in public schools, in his view, "is no more than the instinctive totalitarian impulse of every successful state." Judges who decide against religious landlords or who permit the Air Force to disallow the wearing of yarmulkes in uniform are agents of the state, which explains why they take the positions they do. The state, Carter writes at one point, has the guns. At least in Ameri-

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ca, it may never have to use them, but that is because of "our evidently hopeless passion for statism," our belief in the inherent rightness of government.

I have a hard time recognizing in Carter's treatment of these issues the long history of hostility to the state in America. Nor can his view of even a liberal state's totalitarian temptations explain why the state's monopoly over public schools is in fact being broken. And just as it is true that religious believers can sometimes be bad, it is also the case that sometimes civil servants can serve the public good. There is every reason to believe that if we ever are to have a diversity of voices including both the secular and the religious, it will be because government will protect the capacity of the diverse to live together.

"I love this nation," Carter writes at the beginning of this book. "But my mind is not so clouded with the vapors of patriotism that I place my country before my God. If the country were to force me to a choice, and increasingly this nation tends to do that to many religious people, I would unhesitatingly, if not for some sadness for my country, choose my God."

If America were governed by a dictatorship of atheists intent on rooting out any signs of faith, Carter's dramatic declaration might be justified. But we live in a society wrestling with a highly complicated issue of how religion and politics intersect and for which there may not be any perfect solution. To suggest, as he does, that he will withdraw his allegiance if America does not come around to a point of view he can accept is to adopt a Manichaean view of the world perhaps appropriate to issues like slavery and genocide, but out of place, if not destructive, in a pluralistic society. Democracy, liberty, and even faith itself cannot be sustained in such uncompromising terms. To live up to its ideals, America must make room for faith. To live in this world, people of faith must make room for democracy.

"It is peculiar and sad, as the nation strides into a new century," Carter continues, "that we continue to find so many Americans who agree with this message: that religion, on balance, does more harm than good, and certainly has no place in our politics." Yes, there are judges who discriminate against the faithful, and one should never discount the hostility toward religion that can be found among certain liberal thinkers. But at a time when one presidential candidate speaks of Jesus as his favorite philosopher, let alone when a vice-presidential candidate's Orthodox Judaism helps his ticket in the polls, Carter's belief that ordinary Americans are hostile to religion is a misdiagnosis of the problem. If there is nonetheless reason why a certain sadness is appropriate, it is because a writer as thoughtful and eloquent as Stephen Carter has so little faith in the good will of his fellow citizens, most of whom agree with his prognosis, even if they do not necessarily share his sense of dread. □

Alan Wolfe *is director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College. His most recent book is* One Nation, After All.

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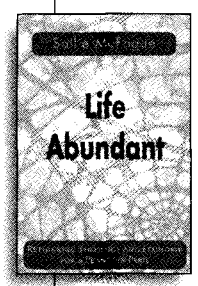

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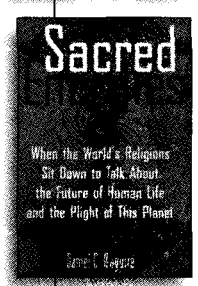

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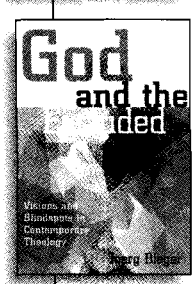

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DUBIOUS DEMONIZING

Cardinal Ratzinger
The Vatican's Enforcer of the Faith
John L. Allen Jr.
Continuum, $24.95, 328 pp.

Joseph A. Komonchak

A French priest got into trouble during the antimodernist repression of the early 1900s when he suggested a radical reform of the Roman curia that would reduce it to two offices, one a congregation for the defense of the faith and another to defend Catholics against the actions of the first congregation. One can sympathize, particularly when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) is making unprecedented claims to near-sovereign authority in dealing with a host of problems in the church today.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger once said that the CDF has the sadly necessary duty of dealing with "the pathology of faith." Under his leadership it appears to have found a good deal of illness. In recent years it has been more noted for its warnings and punishments than for the positive promotion of doctrine that Pope Paul VI proposed as its chief purpose when, at the close of Vatican II, he set out new norms for what until then had been called the Holy Office. The CDF's recent actions have made Cardinal Ratzinger the target not only of criticism but of downright vilification.

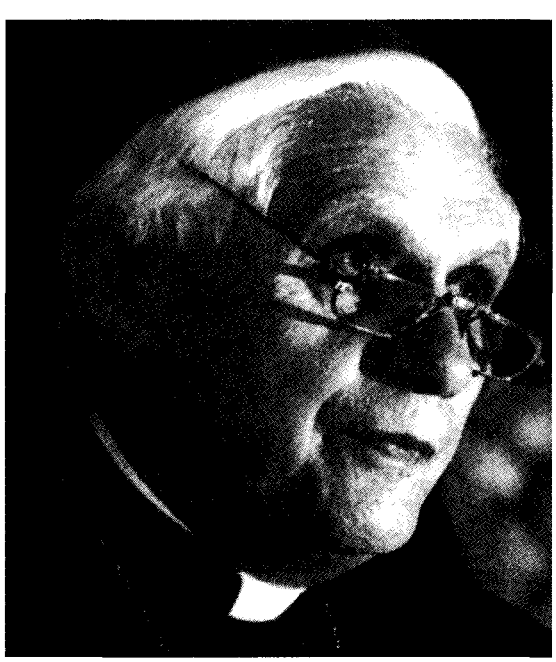
John L. Allen tells us in his preface that he was startled by the CDF's actions because they ran counter to the Vatican II Catholicism in which he, born in 1965, had been raised. He set out to discover what might have led Ratzinger, one of the progressive theologians at the council, to the series of positions he has expressed both in private speeches and articles and in the official actions of his office. Allen wanted his book to avoid the polarization in the contemporary church that he nicely describes: "Neither side is willing to spend the intellectual effort to deeply understand the concerns that drive their opponents, the arguments that have led them to the conclusions they hold, the alternatives they have considered and rejected."

Rome bureau chief for the *National Catholic Reporter*, Allen presumably counts himself among those journalists who he says, with greater confidence than many can muster, "instinctively seek 'all sides' of a discussion." Unfortunately, Allen seems to think that there are only two sides on most of the issues he raises, and he finds Ratzinger regularly on the wrong one.

In his preface, Allen has a few lines about Ratzinger's personal kindness and sincerity and near the end of the book almost three pages on four points on which he thinks the cardinal worth listening to. But Allen sees himself as a product and representative of what he calls, with a reference to Michael Harrington's famous book, "the other Catholicism," inspired and shaped by Vatican II. It is the "evolving, socially engaged, compassionate Catholicism that was the incubator of my faith," and what he thinks Ratzinger is trying to curb. He contrasts Catholic "reformers" with "restorationists" and a "traditionalist camp" in which he includes Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Theologians are divided into "a minority reflexively loyal to Rome" and a majority "who are instinctively suspicious of church authority." There hardly ever appears to be, in any of these contrasts, a middle ground.

The same oversimplifying framework controls Allen's detailed treatment of Roman actions with regard to liberation theology, women and homosexuals, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, and moral theology. Because the issues at stake are most often presented in either-or terms and the points at debate are reviewed with little depth or nuance, the drama of the confrontations is reduced to a series of power plays by an "enforcer" and the consequences are described hyperbolically. The end of one chapter will give a sense of the whole treatment: "Like Ratzinger's crusades against liberation theology, feminism, and gay rights, the pall that he has cast over ecumenism and interreligious dialogue has had consequences beyond the borders of academic theology. It has contributed to making the world a more fractured, and therefore a more dangerous, place."

These descriptions are preceded by chapters in which Allen reviews Ratzinger's youth under Hitler's regime, from which he believes the cardinal has not yet learned all the lessons ("Having seen fascism in action, Ratzinger today believes that the best antidote to political totalitarianism is ecclesial totalitarianism"); superficially discusses the chief theological influences on Ratzinger's thought; explores his



He's listening

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role at Vatican II, his disappointment at the council's aftermath, and what Allen considers the decisive experience of student unrest at the University of Tübingen in 1968. He also selectively reviews three of Ratzinger's major works, and rapidly describes his brief term as archbishop of Munich before he was appointed head of the CDF. Much useful information can be found here, but the treatment is very uneven, inadequately documented, and marred by historical and bibliographical mistakes.

The most convincing section offers evidence that, contrary to the cardinal's repeated claim, his views on a number of important issues (collegiality, episcopal conferences, tradition, liturgy, ecumenism, divorce and remarriage) have changed over the decades. Allen finds continuity, however, in an enduring Augustinian counterposing of church and culture. There is something to this, and its roots lie in an anthropology and epistemology that profoundly shape the fashion and the terms in which Ratzinger spontaneously frames an issue. Had this theological key been explored at greater length and with greater subtlety, Allen might have been more successful in situating Ratzinger within the history and variety of twentieth-century Catholic theology and in analyzing the tensions that divide Catholics. Instead he is content with the kind of Manichaean journalism from which Catholics suffer so much today.

This is too bad because we could use a good analysis and critique of the thought and actions of a man who has played so powerful a role in the church over the last twenty years.

Ratzinger's theology, early and late, fits within a trajectory of Catholic thought that was one of the paths of renewal that made Vatican II possible. It was not the only one, of course, and a much-neglected dynamic of Vatican II was the tension among various groups within the majority. Their differences, latent when the common goal was getting rid of the official texts prepared for the council, began to be expressed in the last two sessions of the council and are visible in the final texts. When the council was followed by some developments in the church that few if any had anticipated, the tensions became divisions and their representatives now vie over how to interpret Vatican II, both as a set of documents and as an event in the life of the church. For the moment the line represented by Cardinal Ratzinger is in the ascendancy in Rome and claims a monopoly on the interpretation of the council; and he has not hesitated to use the power of his office to reinforce this line, sometimes in language and by means that are difficult to reconcile with either the texts of Vatican II or the council's communion-inspired methods. But to show all this would require a more attentive and critical book than this one. □

The Reverend Joseph A. Komonchak, *a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, holds the John C. and Gertrude P. Hubbard Chair in Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America. He is the co-editor of the English-language edition of the* History of Vatican II *(Orbis/Peeters).*

RONNIE & THE BOYS

The Knox Brothers
Penelope Fitzgerald
Counterpoint, $26, 304 pp.

Edward T. Wheeler

During the twenties and early thirties, the Catholic church in England made a miscalculation, the kind of error which history permits to Rome so that she can resume her majestic progress undisturbed."

This statement of ecclesiastical apologetics prefaces Penelope Fitzgerald's deft and sympathetic handling of the ministry of her uncle, Monsignor Ronald Knox. In a fundamental way, the providential view of history that the quotation expresses informs this whole study, her interleaved biography of her three uncles and her father, the Knox brothers of the title. Fitzgerald died earlier this year just before completing the new introduction to this book, which was originally published in 1977. She was eighty-four. This work on her family as well as a biography of Edward Burne-Jones, the Victorian painter, inaugurated her career as a writer.

Distinguished pedigree

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It is tempting to read *The Knox Brothers* not for its subject matter, but for what it reveals of the much acclaimed novelist to come—an author of nine novels, including *The Blue Flower*, winner of the National Book Critics Award. The familiar trope that sees the artist as the god of a fictional universe, an imaginative providence that creates and directs, is in many ways a satisfying way to describe the effect of Fitzgerald's technique as a novelist. Her fiction often gives the sense of a narrator who lets us glimpse only darkly the forces that drive her characters and plots. As a biographer, she is much more direct: *The Knox Brothers* includes a diagram of an elaborate family tree pointing to the confluence of families and temperaments. Her account of Thomas French, bishop of Lahore, the maternal grandfather of the four brothers, provides the key to understanding what makes them such extraordinary figures.

French wore himself out in missionary zeal, dying in the Middle East, an aged ascetic, continuing his mission to convert to Evangelical Christianity those Muslims who protected him as they rejected his message. Heroic struggle in extreme conditions with little hope of what the world terms success was French's legacy to his four grandsons. Two, Wilfred and Ronnie, worked out this providence in religious ways, the two elder brothers, Eddie, editor of *Punch*, and Dilly, classicist and code breaker, in secular efforts. All, as the author tells us, "shared one sense of humor and one mind." The technical challenges involved in breaking this unity into the four brotherly parts is considerable; Fitzgerald's ability to meet the demands of telling four stories of brothers increasingly different in career as they age makes this book both a tour de force and a fascinating comparative study.

It is, above all, an account that starts in a Victorian vicarage. The brothers' father was also an Anglican bishop of Low Church or Evangelical faith. The shaping effect of religion, of commitment to divine causes through social reform, was everywhere apparent as the boys matured and the century turned. Life was to be lived not in calm retirement, but in a sort of divine game, whose rules spurred the young men in sibling rivalry. The list of famous acquaintances and friends bulks large in the book's index. The Knox brothers, through the traditional links of public school and Oxbridge, were intimately involved in the major social, artistic and intellectual movements of their age. They register the effects of World War I (Eddie served and was wounded, Ronnie lost two of his closest friends), of Bloomsbury, and of the social upheavals of the twenties. Yet in Ronnie and Wilfred, the long shadow of Cardinal Newman, of the Tractarians and the Oxford movement, is still unmistakable. These two men struggled with the validity of Anglican orders and sacramental theology.

Eddie and Dilly labored in different vineyards: journalism (to make a mission of *Punch*!) and philology. Dilly, an atheist, found his real life's work not in the editing of classical texts, but in cryptography, working on deciphering enemy secret communications during both World War I and II. The account Fitzgerald gives

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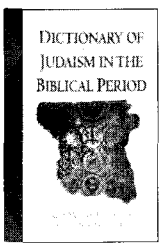

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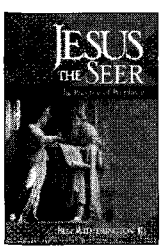

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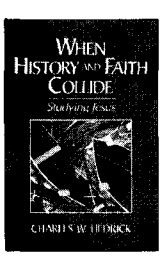

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of the breaking of the German Enigma code is a tale well told. Eddie, the writer's father, was a humorist and legendary editor. Her treatment of him is oddly distant, again reminiscent of the narrative stance in many of Fitzgerald's novels; she manages to convey acute perception with steady reserve, an effect that is literally uncanny.

Commonweal readers will find the description of the English Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic communities obliquely, but intriguingly told. Fitzgerald thinks the Catholic church misused her uncle's talents. Ronnie, the famous monsignor, was Catholic chaplain at Oxford and occupied places in prominent social circles showing publicly a Catholic establishment "every bit as good" as the Anglican. Her reflections on his work in translating the Vulgate into a modern English version shows her sense of the limitations of his efforts, both ecclesiastical and personal, and the triumph of his will and faith. How public indeed was Ronnie's presence may be difficult for a modern reader to appreciate: he was the most famous English Catholic convert of his age (his bishop father disinherited him) and bore the peculiar burden of apologist in his books, journalism, and radio broadcasts. Evelyn Waugh wrote the first biography of Ronald. Knox's translation of the Bible was intended to be his gift to the church, a testament to the English tongue that would make Holy Writ live for his countrymen. Where the work stands in relation to other modern versions is left moot by his niece. It is her uncle, the Anglo-Catholic Wilfred, however, whom she presents as most the heir to Bishop French. As a superior in the Oratory of the Good Shepherd and a Cambridge don, Wilfred seems, by sheer force of eccentric will and ascetic temperament, to have defined spirituality for generations of Cambridge undergraduates—and for his niece.

To take seriously one's lineage, the intersections of lives in family trees, is to see legacies as gifts or constraints and as directed to some end in oneself. To convey the workings of this sort of providence in four brothers, avowedly one in mind and sense of humor, helps show how Fitzgerald saw the world in a way that harks back to another age, one of faith greater perhaps than we are likely to find in biographers today. At the end of this good biography, the author remains a distant presence, yet she was almost sixty years of age and about to start her career as a novelist. The book represents her coming to terms with herself, if nothing else. □

Edward T. Wheeler *is dean of the faculty at the Williams School in New London, Connecticut.*

QUESTIONING THE HYPE

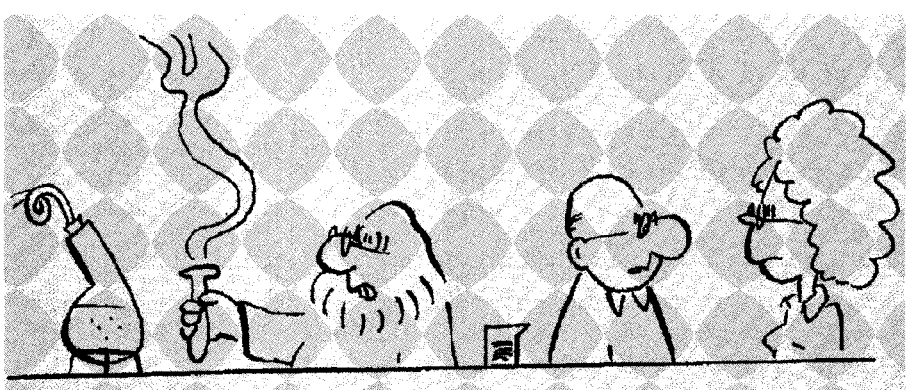
The Century of the Gene
Evelyn Fox Keller
Harvard University Press, $22.95, 182 pp.

Austin L. Hughes

In 1971 the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission issued a series of recorded interviews with scientists involved in the development of nuclear energy under the title "Century of the Atom." It is a testimony to the amazing progress of molecular biology since then (and to the end of the cold war and its terrors) that Evelyn Fox Keller can plausibly rechristen the twentieth century *The Century of the Gene*. What Keller's book offers is a brief but bracing history of the major achievements of genetics in a century that began with the rediscovery of Gregor Mendel's seminal work on heredity and ended with the near completion of a human genomic sequence.

The Century of the Gene is unusual among popular histories of science in that it largely avoids both technical minutiae and sociological or historical background. Rather, it is almost exclusively a history of ideas, even a history of just one idea—the concept of the gene. Keller's aim, one that she achieves admirably, is to give readers just enough information about discoveries in molecular biology so that they can appreciate the consequence of those discoveries for our understanding of what genes are.

Introductory biology students learn that a gene is a linear sequence of DNA encoding a polypeptide. In other words, a gene provides the information needed to synthesize one of the linear polypeptide strands that is subsequently folded and, in some cases, combined with other such strands to make a fully functional protein. Recent discoveries have added layers of complexity to this simplified picture, as Keller recounts. But the basic



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truth that genes are templates directing polypeptide synthesis remains unchallenged. How a multicellular individual arises from a single-celled zygote as a result of the synthesis of different proteins at different times and in different cell lineages over the course of development is, however, still an unsolved problem.

Keller has set her sights on demolishing a widely held but simplistic concept of the set of genes constituting a genome as a "program" for making an organism. In fact, as molecular biology has convincingly demonstrated, a genome by itself can no more produce an organism than a blueprint can build a house.

One weakness of this book is that Keller does not document the prevalence of the simplistic concept of the gene which she is opposing. As a consequence, molecular biologists, to whom none of what she says is news, may be inclined to conclude that she is attacking a straw man. However, a cursory look at the popular media should be enough to convince anyone that naive genetic determinism is alive and well. Such widely read books of the '70s as Edward O. Wilson's *On Human Nature* and Richard Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene* gave currency to reductionist views that are now part of our culture. According to such views, not only is human behavior genetically determined to a substantial degree, but also there exist individual genes that give rise to individual behavioral traits like aggressiveness or altruism. Recall stories in the press a few years ago announcing the "discovery" of a "gene for homosexuality." Though Keller does not discuss this particular case, any reader who absorbs the basic lesson of her book will know enough to be deeply skeptical of any such claims. Encoding complex human behavior patterns is just not something genes can do.

This realization may provide some comfort to those who are troubled by the potential for ethical misuse arising from biotechnology. Some of the scare stories we read about "designer genes" will never come true because they rest on an unrealistic view of the omnipotence of the gene. However, there is still reason to fear that misguided individuals, themselves holding outmoded notions of genetic determinism, will wreak mischief on unborn victims in the name of unrealizable eugenic goals. Mengele, after all, had very mistaken notions of genetics and biochemistry, but because those in power shared his misconceptions he was able to proceed with "experiments" as useless as they were cruel. One important safeguard against future biotechnological Mengeles is a widespread appreciation of the true nature of genes. For this reason, books like *The Century of the Gene* have a vital role to play in educating the public against dangerous oversimplifications.

Keller comments on the ability of practicing scientists to continue to employ a word like "gene" even while its basic meaning is undergoing almost continual change. Naively, one might expect scientific terminology to have greater precision and stability than does everyday language. As Keller points out, much of scientific language must indeed have these properties. Otherwise the repeatability that is the hallmark of the scientif-

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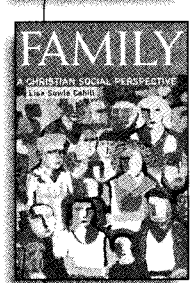

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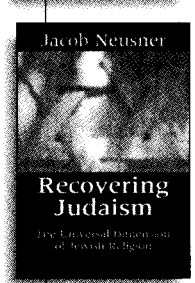

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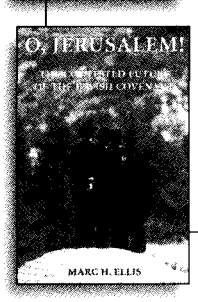

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ic method would be impossible. But one of the more intriguing conclusions of *The Century of the Gene* is that there is a place in science for concepts that are open-ended, for a kind of creative fuzziness. This should not come as a surprise to those who subscribe to philosopher Otto Neurath's metaphor for science as a boat which we are constantly repairing while at the same time managing to stay afloat in it.

What will happen to the concept of the gene in the future? Part of Keller's message is that, if the twentieth century was the century of the gene, the twenty-first century will be, even for molecular biologists, the century of something else. Doubtless she is right that in the near future biology will pay increasing attention to the complex molecular interactions that underlie development from zygote to adult. In addition, the vast amounts of information made available by the genome projects are already opening a new era of bioinformatics, in which computer analysis will play an ever more crucial role in biology. But will the very term "gene" disappear, as Keller seems to hope? To return to Neurath's metaphor: Is "gene" a plank that has outlived its usefulness and will soon be discarded from the boat altogether? Or will it, in some as yet unimagined way, be recycled as part of a new, more solid structure? I think it is too early to tell. □

Austin L. Hughes *teaches biology at the University of South Carolina.*

AT SEA

The Song and the Truth
Helga Ruebsamen
Translated from the Dutch by Paul Vincent
Alfred A. Knopf, $26, 356 pp.

Madeline Marget

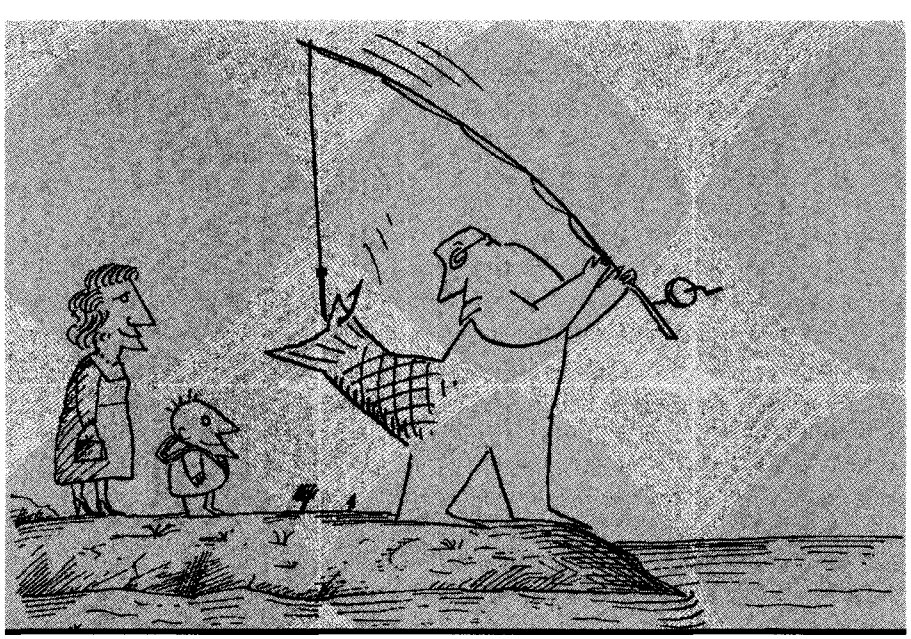
Here is a novel about a world that, no matter how broken, remains whole. Most of the action takes place during World War II and some of the principal characters are Jewish. But *The Song and the Truth* is not a Holocaust novel. Nor, despite the intricate layers and variety of spritual life and belief that are central to the story, is this properly speaking a religious novel. *The Song and the Truth* escapes easy categorization.

Lulu, a child, narrates the story which begins in 1938 in Java—a paradise, gorgeous, sensual and complete. There, in contrast to its biblical counterpart, innocence is neither a goal nor an ideal. Because of the narrator's extreme youth, however, innocence is present in the telling. An occasional flash forward gives Lulu the wisdom and perspective of more than fifty years, and replaces curiosity with knowledge when we need it.

Lulu's world is thickly populated. There are her mother and father, Hélène and Cees; her mother's sister, Margot, and her fiancé Felix, who is also Lulu's father's brother; Tinka, a teenager said to be Lulu's aunt, who is really more like a sister; and a nursemaid, Aleida, the only person whom the child does not like. Lulu's world is also filled with the supernatural: "night people," who are versions of real servants who work during the day, as well as deities, among them Christ, called "son of a god," the Buddha, and those who live in trees or streams. Ruebsamen keeps each of the godly and the human characters (many more than I have listed here) clear, distinct, and fully alive.

Much of the strong feeling *The Song and the Truth* arouses comes from the juxtaposition of Lulu's innocence and her shadowed, adult surroundings, both tropical and European. In both emotion and narrative, however, the most moving component of the novel is the love the child feels for the people around her. We know their clothes, the feel of their flesh, their expressive nuances, their tenderness for Lulu. We know their preoccupations and routines: the "tea ladies" in Java who enact colonial rituals; Hélène's writing, playfulness, and discontent; the long hours that Cees spends at his obstetrical clinic, fulfilling the destiny set by his mother, an eventually famous couturier, whom doctors mistreated at the time of his birth because she was then poor and unmarried.

In the evenings Lulu's father reads letters from his family in Europe, each time pacing in fury and frustration, and



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then retreating to his study. He cannot bear to be apart from his Jewish family in France and Holland during their terrible time. And so he, Hélène, Margot, Tinka, Lulu, and her baby brother leave Java, traveling on a ship called *Garuda*, named after the man-bird who was the god Vishnu's steed. Lulu, with Tinka as her particular companion, wishes for home but finds life mysterious on board, just as she did on land.

At one stop, her father disembarks to bring Benjamin Silberman, a famous pianist, on board. Cees loves Benjamin—who, it is eventually revealed, is his father. Hélène despises him, and the girls befriend him. The old, and now frail, musician shows Tinka and Lulu a stash of shiny stones and tells them the treasure's existence is a secret. Only Mimi, Cees's mother, living in Holland, is to know.

When Benjamin dies the girls, in a misguided effort to carry out what they believe to be his wishes, throw his fortune into the sea. They are not found out, and the incident has no obvious further ramifications, but their act raises questions that become more profound and pressing when Lulu and Tinka, now in Holland, again act together in unintentional destructiveness.

After the journey, when the family is still living freely in The Hague, the two girls imagine—sometimes by discerning patterns and directions in a Persian rug—a scenario they believe will lead them back home to the Dutch East Indies. They carry out the plan, and death results. Here, as elsewhere, the novel's action poses ethical questions: If people are too innocent to foresee the outcome of their dangerous thoughts and activities, are they responsible for the result? What constitutes innocence? If one tries to help another, but in a secret, complicit way that leads to disaster, who bears the guilt? If the planners make their dreadful mistake because they lack wisdom and experience, are they at fault? How are they to bear the guilt that comes from such tragedy? How can other people help?

Ruebsamen allows for such reflection through the structure of her narrative. In just a phrase or two, the narrator alludes to the future while she keeps the reader focused on the present action. Similarly, she paradoxically maintains mystery through revelation, answering questions we have not thought to ask about the characters' history and formation.

Essential to *The Song and the Truth* is the palpable warmth of home, of Java, and the corresponding cold of foreign lands. One comes to understand those climates metaphorically as well as literally. Despite the often painful circumstances and events of Lulu's life, she emerges as a person who can fully recreate the emotional meaning of her story. From the very beginning, the beautiful, self-effacing language of the novel (Paul Vincent's translation into English is wonderfully colloquial and poetic) engages us. That, along with Ruebsamen's passion and intelligence, grips the reader until the end of the novel, and after. □

Madeline Marget, *a frequent contributor, lives in Newton, Massachusetts.*

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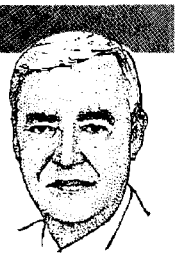

Lawrence S. Cunningham

A few years ago in this column I reviewed favorably Oscar Cullmann's *Prayer in the New Testament* (1995) which, like every book on the subject, pays tribute to Joachim Jeremias's classic *The Prayers of Jesus* (1978). In the face of these formidable scholars, Robert Karris asks rhetorically, why yet another book on New Testament prayer? For one, a lot of scholarly work has been done since Jeremias wrote. Further, Cullmann pays little attention to books of the New Testament beyond the synoptics, John, and the authentic letters of Paul. By contrast, Karris writes a wonderful opening chapter on the prayer of the historical Jesus with particular attention to Jewish prayer of the time. He follows with an excellent discussion of Luke-Acts (Cullmann did not discuss Acts), a chapter on John, and one on Paul with a focus on Philippians. Karris then rounds out his book with a consideration of the hymns in Revelation and a wonderful chapter on the Letter of James. At the end of each chapter, Karris provides a helpful bibliography of pertinent references to aid further study.

Prayer and the New Testament
Robert Karris
Crossroad, $25.95, 232 pp.

Karris has produced an unusual book for a biblical scholar. For while he has complete command of that literature, Karris is also a scholar of matters Franciscan. He does not shy away from quoting Bonaventure's commentary on Luke, which he has just translated, or the *Admonitions of Saint Francis*, about which he has recently written. These references, as well as asides on pastoral practice, art, and music, never lead Karris away from his primary task: close reading of prayers found in the New Testament. Karris is particularly good at explicating New Testament prayers which have entered the formal prayer life of the church. He has a wonderfully readable discussion of the Lord's Prayer in both the recension of Matthew and the one of Luke. He summarizes and synthesizes excellent research on Mary's hymn, the "Magnificat," as well as liturgical staples, the "Benedictus" and the "Nunc Dimittis."

What I most enjoyed about *Prayer and the New Testament* are the many new ways in which Karris approaches the subject of prayer. He discusses, for instance, the places where the biblical writer tells us that Jesus prayed but where the contents of those prayers are unrecorded; these instances are almost always, Karris says, responses to moments of crisis or decision-making. He insightfully observes that in the Gospel of John the supposed digression about John the Baptist (John 1: 6-8) is not an interruption at all. Following a suggestion by Morna Hooker, Karris argues that those verses refer to the Incarnation—a point which will now compel me to modify what I have been telling my freshmen for the past decade or so! In another place, Karris notices that Paul invokes the name of God twenty times in the very brief letter to the Philippians, leading us to consider the letter as a kind of prayer.

Anyone who reads *Prayer and the New Testament* will learn a good deal. My only wish is that Karris had considered those petitions directed to Jesus, phrases such as "Lord, that I may see" or "I do believe, help my unbelief." They are profound prayers for use by Christians today. That small omission aside, this is a fine book, every bit as good as Cullmann's (in some ways, better) and an excellent updating of Jeremias.

John Jay Hughes is not a biblical scholar but he does have something in common with Robert Karris: he is a priest with an instinctual pastoral sense. Hughes's little volume, *Stories Jesus Told*,

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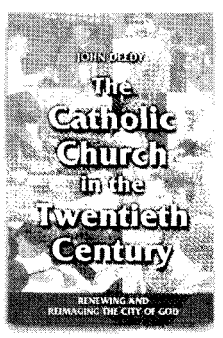

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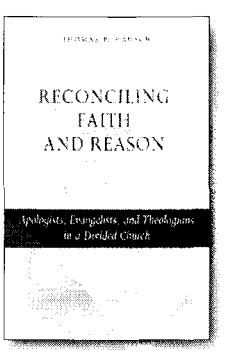

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Stories Jesus Told
Modern Meditations on the Parables
John Jay Hughes
Liguori, $13.95, 133 pp.

is a series of meditations on the parables, first given as retreat conferences to the contemplative Sisters of Jesus Crucified, whose members include women suffering from physical disabilities.

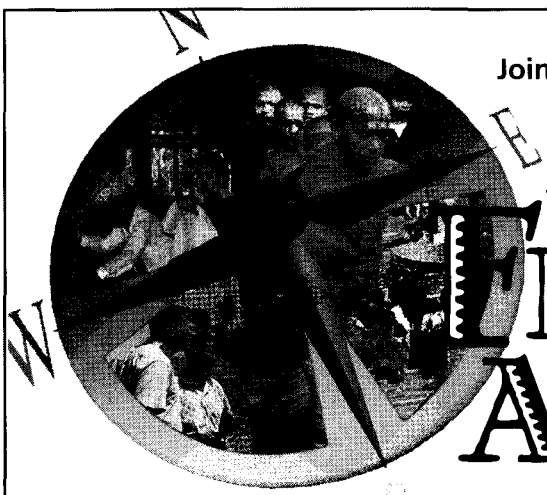
Hughes wants these chapters to be read as a kind of *lectio divina* with the hope that they will energize the reader's prayer life. What he does not say, but what comes through clearly in these pages, is that his meditations are enhanced by many shrewd pastoral observations. Hughes notes, for instance, the spiritual progress in people who come to confession with an unaltering list of sins in their having not found nor given in to new ways of sinning.

Borrowing from other commentators, Hughes characterizes parables as stories that take something universally recognizable from common experience and then force the listener or reader to see something unexpected and not at all ordinary. If the original context of the parable is strange to us (how many of us sow seeds in a field?), the hidden meaning is pertinent today once we understand the story's multilayered ambiguity. At times that social context needs unpacking. For example, of the parable of the widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18, Hughes says that though we imagine the widow as old, it is more likely that she was not, since women in those days married young and life was more precarious. Although one of the most vulnerable people in ancient society, bereft of a social safety net, and victim of a corrupt court, the widow is full of insistent vitality and forces a reversal; she strikes fear in a judge who fears neither man nor God, and she receives justice.

Hughes is a careful and deeply spiritual reader of these strange stories Jesus told. His little volume would make a wonderful companion on retreat, or can be savored simply as a guide to prayerful reading of the Scriptures. It is in that spirit that I recommend it both for its substance and for its highly readable style.

Christian Hermit in an Islamic World is a curious book. It is a translation of a study of the French hermit-mystic Charles de Foucauld, published twenty-five years ago in France. What makes the work singular is that its author, Ali Merad, was a Muslim teaching in a French university. Merad well understands that Charles de Foucauld had a superior attitude towards the Tuareg people among whom he lived in Algeria. He also understands that de Foucauld's practice of loving presence was a form of pre-evangelization and that de Foucauld believed French culture would benefit the Algerian Muslim population. Merad understands this because he grasps that Charles de Foucauld, like all of us, was a man of his own time.

Christian Hermit in an Islamic World
Ali Merad
Paulist, $12.95, 115 pp.



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Despite his contextualization of the great French mystic within the ideology of the *mission civilisatrice* of the day, Merad argues that de Foucauld should not be seen exclusively within such a reductionistic framework. In an authentic attempt at interreligious understanding, Merad argues in this work (almost a pamphlet) that de Foucauld incarnates three spiritual characteristics that are compatible with the culture of Islam. De Foucauld was a person of deep renunciation; his spirituality exemplified the mystical sense of silence before the majesty of God; and he strove fully to imitate Christ in his life. In doing those things, de Foucauld served as a countersign to the often (his judgment not mine) narrow, prestige-preoccupied, and hypocritical hereditary marabouts who headed up the various sectarian movements in Algerian Islam. Too often, according to Merad, what these religious leaders desired was power—something that de Foucauld radically eschewed.

While Merad recognizes de Foucauld's attempt to palliate the worst abuses of French colonialism, there is a prophetic edge to Merad's analysis of colonialism. This analysis can serve us well when we consider the sad situation in present-day Algeria where Christian religious, faithful to the idea of silence, presence, and contemplative prayer, can find themselves lethally at odds with certain extreme Islamic movements. The ghastly martyrdom a few years ago of the six Trappist monks at the monastery of our Lady of the Atlas vividly demonstrated that fact.

The translator provides an afterword which reflects on Merad's analysis, calls for a better dialogue between Muslims and Christians (crucial today in France with its large population of immigrants from North Africa), and imagines how that dialogue might progress. That latter reflection is somewhat sketchy (the literature on such exchanges is vast) so one would have to go to other sources for more complete accounts. In sum, this readable little book shows its age here and there but is not without interest. It brings a new angle of study to one of the luminous spiritual persons of our age.

Dictionary of Third World Theologies
Virginia Fabella & R. S. Sugirtharajah, editors.
Orbis, $50, 261 pp.

The editors of *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* gathered writers from all over the world to compile a survey of "issues specifically related to the third world and its theological concerns...written solely by the people normally relegated to the periphery." This is a dictionary in the strict sense: none of the entries runs more than a few pages. On large topics like "Trinity" or "God" there is little more than a page, which means that one does not learn much. By contrast, "globalization" goes on for nearly four pages. Implicit in this contrast, one supposes, is that the unfamiliar requires the longest consideration. The articles themselves can be strangely selective. The one on "martyrdom," for example, is silent

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about the deaths of so many Christians in Algeria and the Sudan.

The dictionary is most useful in lexical entries which illumine words not normally seen in theological discourse unless one reads very widely. Thus, I instructed myself on terms like the following: "Burakumin" (an outcast class of people in Japan); "Chipko Movement" (Himalayan movement to resist deforestation); "Han" (a Korean word representing the accumulated feeling of sadness/resignation of the poor) and "Minjung" (Korean for the common people); "Pachamama" (an Andean word for Mother Earth). There are entries describing ecclesial life and theological reflection rooted in different locales. These are somewhat capriciously listed (there are entries on Indonesia, Vietnam, and Myanmar but none on India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh). Larger rubrics like "Bible" have subentries surveying attitudes about and approaches to the Bible in various countries.

The dictionary is very superficial when it focuses on large theological themes but very good when it illuminates specific topics like those mentioned above. The editors admit that their biggest problem was deciding what to include and what to omit. They might have been better advised to allow the theological topics to speak within the context of entries on different liberation movements around the world.

As a reference work, the dictionary is only slightly serviceable in its own right. But I do think that it might work as an exploratory model for a full-scale encyclopedia, one in which these fascinating topics could be more fully explored. □

Lawrence S. Cunningham *teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

Coming issues of COMMONWEAL

November 17th
Daria Donnelly
on Children's Books

December 1
Christmas Critics

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

I don't think it is good for society that gays and lesbians have to depend on the good will of the straight majority for civil rights. Moreover, I think it very insensitive of you to discuss the measure of pain and abuse in various groups saying that, well, the pain of women and gays cannot compare to that of African Americans.

For African Americans, women, gays and lesbians, Jews, and Gypsies, pain is pain, and the frustration at being excluded affects all. Who are the Lindas and Joyces of this world, the good darkies, the assimilated Jews? It will not wash to say those who look like us, keep a low profile, and don't agitate for reform can expect to get some measure of acceptance. JAMES STUART OSBOURN

New York, N.Y.

(Continued on page 42)

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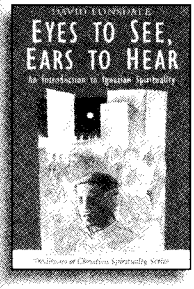

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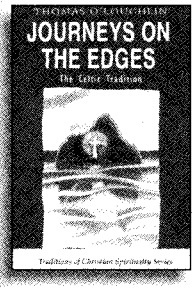

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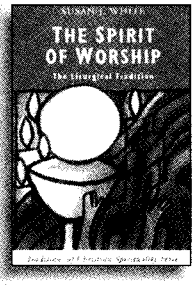

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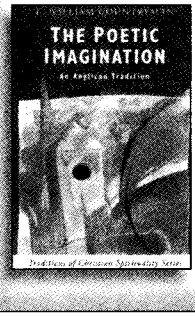

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Justice, not sex

At least you appear to wrestle with the subject—a hopeful sign—but otherwise your editorial on "The Homosexual Agenda" is at best misleading in its caricature of a presumed "agenda."

You write of a "reasoned resistance to same-sex unions and to teaching that homosexual and heterosexual sex are equivalent." Really? Is that what you believe the impetus is behind Vermont's law to permit domestic partners to register their civil unions? Equivalent sex? Or, as you later say, "to overlook strongly held views about appropriate partners for sexual intercourse"?

This isn't about some medieval conception of equivalency of sexual intercourse. That's silly, and it trivializes the very real and widespread discrimination faced by gay and lesbian domestic partners in insurance, employment, housing, and inheritance. This discrimination often owes directly to the failure of the state to recognize these loving and committed unions. This is an issue of public policy, whereas sexual relations are a private matter. Ending this pervasive and harmful discrimination is the agenda.

Reading *Commonweal*'s editorials on this subject in recent years has been consistently disappointing. Yes, there have been excesses and even outrages performed by demonstrators, and *Commonweal* has been justified in noting these failures. But one searches largely in vain for appropriate advocacy on behalf of gays and lesbians whose human rights are still in jeopardy, everyday and everywhere in the world. You can do better.

THOMAS HIGGINS
Pasadena, Calif.

Civil rights

I was disappointed to read your editorial "The Homosexual Agenda." I do not believe that same-sex couples can validly contract marriage, but I do not see how permitting those in such relationships to inherit, make health-care decisions, or adopt children harms any individual couple's matrimonial bond. The Vermont legislature made specific distinctions between marriage and domestic partnerships. Is that not what is appropriate? What more do you want?

I do not maintain that the discrimination I experience as a gay man is equivalent to that suffered by African Americans during the period of American apartheid; in some ways it is similar, in some ways it is different. I have been told outright that I was denied employment due to "lifestyle differences" (I had included in my résumé employment by a national AIDS research foundation). A friend of mine was told outright that he could not be hired because he "did not fit in with the other executives, who are all married."

Our struggle is similar to that of African Americans in one way: we are constantly referred to as dangerous, inferior, criminal. In another way our situation is worse: we are viewed as the greatest of sinners and godless, a threat to the very existence of civilization.

I recall early one morning in 1994 waking to the terror of a major earthquake, my ceiling raining down upon me as furniture crashed around my apartment. After many hours without electricity, I finally was able to clear a place among the rubble to sit and see my city on the television, in ruins. Among the images I saw that day, between the images of destruction and death, was Pat Robertson, who said that the earthquake was God's punishment for homosexuality. I was responsible for the devastation of my city!

When one has lived through something like that, after a lifetime of being told how evil you are, then you can make nuanced distinctions between

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what is and is not prejudice or bigotry.

ERIC STOLTZ
Los Angeles, Calif.

Where's the church?

I was deeply disappointed and disturbed by your editorial "The Homosexual Agenda," which addressed the conflict in Vermont about civil unions for same-sex couples. Civility should reign on both side of the fence, you say. Yet you lay the blame for the rising level of antigay sentiment—whose vehemence and potential for violence you blithely minimize—overwhelmingly on the side of the gay-rights movement.

"It got political because gay-rights advocates made it political," you write. You chide those same advocates for "abandoning democratic debate and legislative arenas for the pursuit of remedies in the courts." You question whether drawing an analogy between the African-American struggle for civil rights and the campaign for gay civil unions is justified.

Although these are highly contentious statements about complex issues, you summarily dismiss possible objections to them before arriving at the core of your argument. You say that the debate encompassing homosexuality, same-sex unions, gender, procreation, and family must ultimately be settled in the public square, not in the courts. Fair enough.

Gay-rights advocates would welcome a full, open, and informed discussion of these issues, which would include the views of gay people, scientists, historians, and religious leaders, among others. Furthermore, gay-rights advocates are not, as you suggest, under the illusion that court rulings or legislation alone are enough to alter deep-seated attitudes toward homosexuality, just as they were not sufficient to overturn longstanding attitudes toward race.

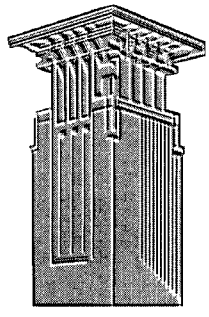
But where, in all this, is the contribution of the Catholic church—a subject that, astonishingly, you manage to ignore entirely? The church potentially could offer rich theological, spiritual, and historical perspectives to this discussion. Tragically, however, it has not advanced beyond the position put forward in its 1986 "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" from Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in which homosexuality is described as a "tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil" and "an objective disorder"—language that is echoed in the new catechism.

Sadly, the begrudging tone and one-sided emphasis of your editorial call to mind another passage from the same Vatican letter: "When civil legislation is introduced to protect behavior to which no one has any conceivable right, neither the church nor society at large should be surprised when other distorted notions and practices gain ground, and irrational and violent actions increase."

JEFFREY A. STONE
New York, N.Y.

Bracing stuff

I thought the editorial, "The Homosexual Agenda" was terrific because it says,



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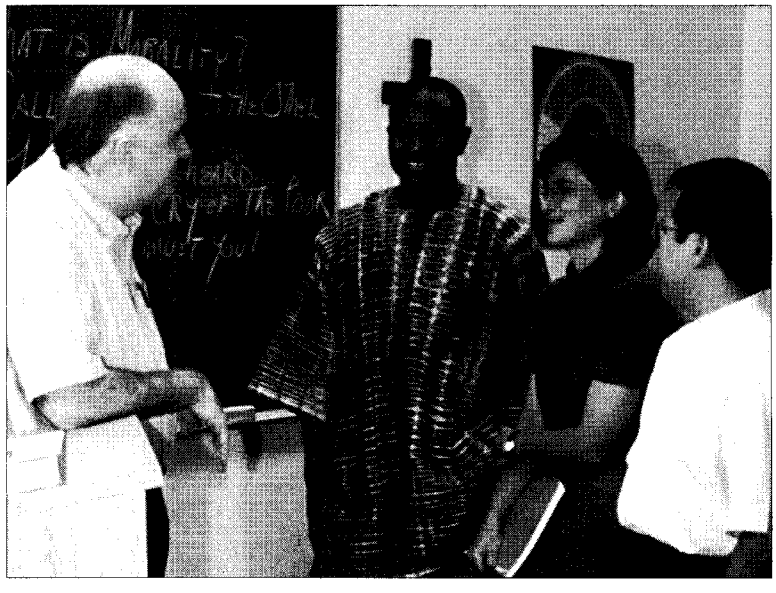

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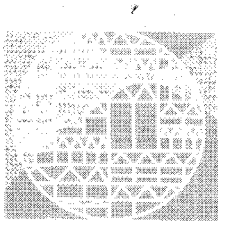

INTRODUCTION BY PETER STEINFELS

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in effect, words matter enormously, and words change things, and slippery analogies lead to half-truths, which lead to a muddy public life, and maybe to a bloody public life. Courteous but sharp-tongued piece of work there. A bracing corrective—the *Commonweal Rx*.

BRIAN DOYLE
Portland, Oreg.

True equality

The "homosexual agenda" is not, as you suggest, about "teaching that homosexual and heterosexual sex are equivalent." It's about teaching that homosexual and heterosexual people are equivalent! Our equality before God is at the core of our Catholic social-justice tradition. As moral theologian Father Richard Peddicord puts it: "The social participation of gay and lesbian persons is not regulated by the virtue of chastity, but by the virtue of justice" (*Catholic Courier*, Rochester, September 24, 1998).

CASEY LOPATA
Rochester, N.Y.

Confession demanded

Your criticism of Pope Pius IX [August 11] is proof positive that *Commonweal* is anything but Catholic.

In fact, I find little substance in any of your editions. Do your readers a favor and admit to them that you're not a Catholic publication.

You'll only be admitting what most of us already know! PAUL MELANSON
Gardner, Mass.

Freedom from religion

I must take issue with your editorial reproaching those who decry Joseph Lieberman's "God talk" [September 22]. In that editorial you say that religiously based political claims are justifiable and should be as debatable as any others.

But this is precisely the problem. Divine revelation is not debatable. If God has told me that, for example, abortion is wrong, no amount of rational argument will convince me otherwise. Someone might convince me that tactically holding back is the best way to achieve my goal, but that is far from a debate about core goals. Someone might seek to argue with me from within my religious tradition, to convince me that my religion does not, in fact, require me to oppose abortion. But that is a very different type of argument, not appropriate for general public debate, since no country (and most especially not this country) is composed of followers of only one faith.

For all of us to have freedom of religion, our political discourse must indeed have freedom from religion.

NATHAN LANDAU
Berkeley, Calif.

The editors reply

Nowhere in the editorial is it suggested that biblical revelation be used to resolve public questions. Religious people must put forth rational arguments to defend their positions on the issues of the day. The Catholic church's opposition to abortion, for example, is made by an appeal to moral reason, not faith.

Commonweal's Orthodox

As an Orthodox Christian I take great pride in seeing the name of our Father

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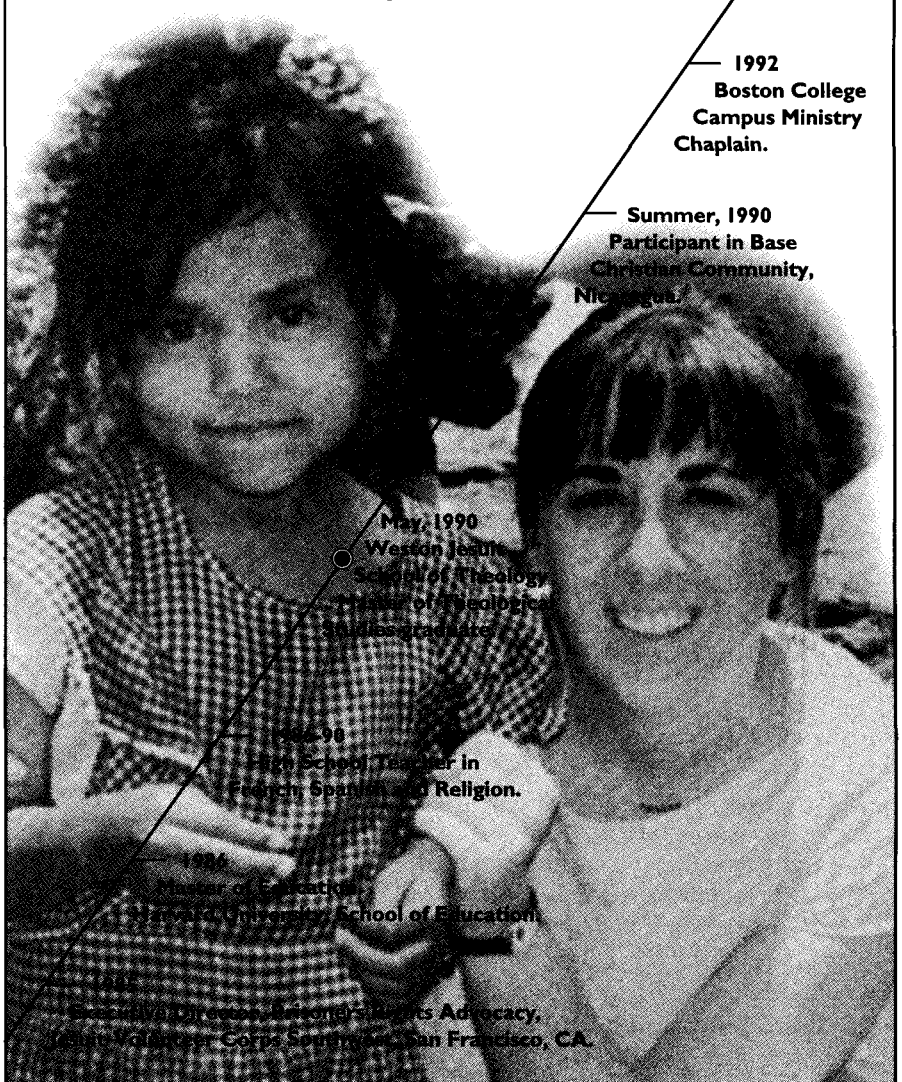

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John Garvey at the head of a regular column in *Commonweal*. His words seem to be a variation—but always insightful, always provocative—on the same theme that I have come to hear again and again since my conversion to Orthodoxy some eighteen months ago: This business of being a Christian is a serious one indeed.

I am reminded of this as I reread his May 19 column, "Opting out of Belief." I have never read more lucid and cogent arguments addressing the subjects of religious indifference and the shallowness of a faith that is shaken by the moral behavior of the clergy.

We are all richer for the Orthodox perspective that *Commonweal* brings us through John Garvey.

JOSEPH TIKHON MURRAY
Waterford, Conn.

Naming names

In your introduction to "Rome and Relativism" [October 20] you say: "many Catholics worry that it is yet another effort to quash theological exploration, especially among theologians engaged in dialogue with Eastern religions..." But I do not find any names or specific writings mentioned in the three critiques.

Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J., may well be the most prominent theologian targeted in connection with *Dominus Iesus*. Dupuis was professor of theology at the University of Delhi, subsequently at Gregorian University in Rome and a specialist in Asiatic religions. His major work is *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis). These are the bits and pieces I have been able to glean from Internet sources: In 1998 the CDF (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) sent a letter of inquiry to Dupuis. Dupuis was relieved temporarily of his teaching duties at the Gregorian in order to reply. He was hospitalized for two weeks (due to this upheaval?). Cardinal Franz König protested to Ratzinger publicly in the British journal, *The Tablet*. Ratzinger replied in the same journal to justify himself. On September 4, 2000, a day before *Dominus Iesus* was issued, Dupuis met with the CDF but, according to sources, the meeting was inconclusive.

This is all the information I have been able to find and I would appreciate further knowledge of the disposition of Dupuis's case. It is, I think, an important one, and his book is a serious and groundbreaking contribution.

NELSON WHITAKER
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Redactor at work

With a view toward the colossal task of correcting Scripture and tradition in light of Father Philip Kennedy's insights on *Dominus Iesus* [October 20], I would like to make two very modest contributions: first, John 14:9 should be corrected to read, "Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen not the complete revelation of God in history, but a partial manifestation of what God may be like'"; and second, 1 Corinthians 12:3 should be ammended to read "no one can say Jesus is Lord, because God is illimitable, no historical reality can manifest the full richness of God." (With apologies to John, Paul, the Holy Spirit, and the RSV.)

Give me a break.

(REV.) RICHARD G. SMITH
Haverstraw, N.Y.

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RELATIVE MORALITY

Willard Francis Jabusch

When was the last time you heard a priest or bishop denounce the evil of divorce? Just as sermons inveighing against contraception have almost disappeared from Catholic pulpits, so too has preaching against divorce. The Catholic church has certainly not changed its teaching about the indissolubility of the marriage bond or its ban against divorce and remarriage, but divorce is certainly not high on the list of major sins for either high or low clergy. Why?

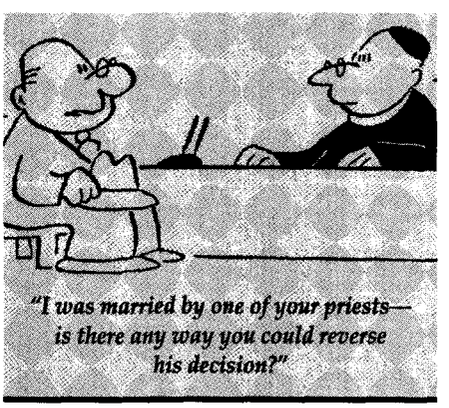
Could it be that just about every bishop and priest has a divorced sibling, niece, nephew, or cousin? A fair number of younger priests and seminarians have divorced parents. Back in the fifties, anyone from a "broken home" would have been kindly but firmly told that he could not be ordained for a major archdiocese like Chicago or Boston. No more! Today, divorce is no longer a remote aberration but a pressing and unhappy reality which has touched the majority of American families. More than half of all marriages in the United States end in the divorce courts and among second marriages the percentage is even higher. It is inevitable, therefore, that the Catholic clergy are not only counseling angry and alienated couples in the parish office but also confronting the pain of divorce among their own relatives.

A priest's or bishop's divorced sister or brother is seen not as a sinner but rather as an unfortunate victim to be granted a declaration of nullity by the Vatican so they are free to remarry and try again.

I recently attended the marriage of a cousin, a baptized Catholic, and a graduate of Catholic schools. He was marrying a divorced woman, mother of a four-year-old girl. His bride, I was told, "was rediscovering her Jewishness" and, in fact, the traditional wine glass was stepped on at the reception and an uncle addressed us in Hebrew. However, the wedding was celebrated in a former Catholic church by a minister of the Church of Religious Science. Other priests have told me that they have had similar experiences after being invited to the weddings of the "mix and match" generation, who are invariably "spiritual" but not especially "religious"—and certainly not interested in "institutions."

Many, of course, do not bother to marry in the first place. Nearly one in four persons over eighteen has never been married. About one-third of all children born in the United States today are born out of wedlock. How does the pastor respond when the single mother stops by to arrange her baby's baptism? Probably with a somewhat greater sensitivity and compassion when he thinks of a relative in the same situation.

The Catholic church has been viewed by the homosexual community as stern and uncompromising. The official words from Rome have offered little consolation. But, as an American bishop remarked when his own brother "came out," attitudes can change. As a former seminary professor, I have seen former students contract AIDS and die. These were not, I think, evil men. Their classmates, to their credit, were quick to support them, visit them, and fill the church at their funerals. It is difficult to be judgmental when a brother, a nephew, or a fellow priest is found to be gay. In the local parishes and dioceses lesbians and gay men are finding the rhetoric to be less harsh and pastors and confessors far less condemnatory. Even cardinal archbishops have shown up to celebrate Mass for the gay community, to welcome and encourage these brothers and sisters of the Lord, to help them live the Christian life, and to lift the burden of guilt. Gay activists may not feel that enough has been done, but it is clear that both bishops and priests have come a long way in thirty years!



"I was married by one of your priests—is there any way you could reverse his decision?"

Families and friends have also been a powerful influence on the clergy's attitudes concerning women's issues. When your ten-year-old niece, already an "altar girl," expresses her outrage that she can never be a priest or bishop, you must, as an ordained minister, start to pay attention. You may or may not be convinced that there are theological arguments which make a female clergy quite impossible, but you also discover that your sisters, nieces, and even your mother and aunts have come to see this as a matter of simple justice. And even a convinced celibate knows he should never underestimate the power of a woman, especially one in his own family. It is not easy at family holiday parties to face an irate niece who finds the Catholic position illogical and deeply unjust, and to discover that every woman around the dining room table is on her side!

Could it be that the curial cardinals and monsignors, who have left their homes and families for powerful positions in the Vatican, would have a more benign approach to the hopes and foibles of humanity if they spent more time with their relatives? □

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